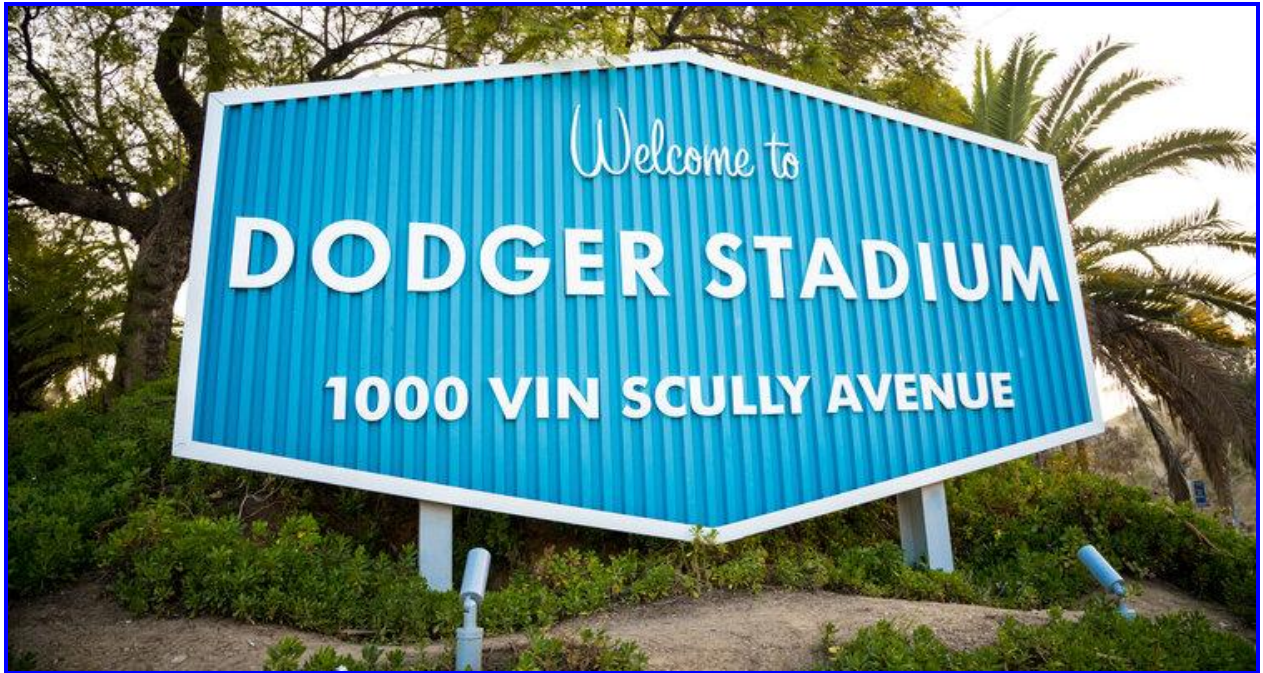


DODGER BLUE

Tom Lasorda's Great Run In Los Angeles: 1977-88



For two decades of Los Angeles Dodgers history they were defined by manager Tom Lasorda. The manager, inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1997, “bled Dodger Blue” by his own proud admission. The Dodgers won games, pennants and championships and this compilation captures his best era, from 1977 to 1988.

Lasorda took over in 1977 and promptly won the National League pennant each of his first two seasons. He made it back to the World Series in 1981 and this time won it. In 1988, his team won it all again.

These were his four pennant winners, but there were other memorable teams. In 1980, the Dodgers got into a one-game playoff for the NL West title before losing. In 1982, they reached the final day of the regular season before falling by the wayside. Two more NL West titles came in 1983 and 1985.

After a couple bad years, 1988 came out of nowhere. There was a surprise run to the division crown. Then consecutive playoff upsets, highlighted by one of the most iconic moments of all time, punctuated a second championship under Lasorda.

The compilation below includes twenty articles that are published individually on TheSportsNotebook.com. Nine of them chronicle the regular seasons in the years noted above. Eleven others are game-by-game narratives of each postseason series the Dodgers played in the 1977-88 era.

We'll cover Vic Davalillo's drag bunt that started an epic playoff rally, Bob Welch's dramatic strike out of Reggie Jackson and Kirk Gibson's stunning walk off blast against Dennis Eckersley. You'll read about great players like Orel Hershiser, Steve Garvey, Ron Cey, Davey Lopes, Tommy John, Don Sutton, Pedro Guerrero and many more.

The Dodgers history--both in Brooklyn and in Los Angeles--is filled with rich lore, and the Tom Lasorda era is an essential part of that history.

1977

It was a year of change. The proud franchise had seen Walter Alston in the dugout as manager every year since 1954, a period that covered the team's last years in Brooklyn and included World Series titles on both coasts. Tom Lasorda got his crack at managing and he made an immediate splash.

Lasorda took over a team that had been a consistent contender since the age of divisional play began in 1969. The Dodgers finished second in the NL West six times from 1970-76. They won the division—and the NL pennant—in 1974 before losing to the Oakland A's in the World Series.

Pitching was the heart of the team, and aided by the friendly pitching environment of Dodger Stadium, the staff had the best ERA in the National League. Four starters worked 200 innings or more, and all were effective.

Tommy John won 20 games with a 2.78 ERA and finished second in the Cy Young voting. Don Sutton was 14-8 with a 3.18 ERA, while Burt Hooton won 12 games and posted a solid 2.62 ERA. Rick Rhoden went 16-10 and his ERA was stable, at 3.74. And the fifth starter, Doug Rau, was very reliable, winning 14 games with a 3.43 ERA.

The bullpen wasn't quite as strong—Charlie Hough saved 22 games, but he went 6-12 in an era when good relievers tended to get more wins than is the case today. Elias Sosa and Mike Garman were both very good, but the depth wasn't there.

Offensively, the Dodgers were built around four hitters who popped 30-plus home runs. Steve Garvey led the way with 33 bombs and 115 RBIs from the first base spot. On the other side of the infield, Ron Cey went for 30 and 110. Dusty Baker and Reggie Smith provided the muscle at the corner outfield spots and each were in the high 80s for RBIs.

Davey Lopes, the speedy second baseman, set the table, with a .372 on-base percentage and 47 steals. Los Angeles was third in the National League in runs scored.

Cincinnati was going through some personnel changes, as the Big Red Machine was starting to break up, but no one could have foreseen how thoroughly the Dodgers dominated the NL West race in 1977. They started 17-3, including a two-game sweep of the Reds behind strong games from Rhoden and Sutton. Los Angeles had a 10-game lead by the first week in May.



When the Dodgers and Reds met again over Memorial Day weekend, Los Angeles' series loss didn't matter much—the lead was still 11 ½ games when the Dodgers left Cincinnati. Their lead never got lower than 6 ½, and that only briefly and soared as high as fourteen games.

The Dodgers were the first of the four division winners to clinch, doing so with almost two weeks to go, as John beat the San Francisco Giants 3-1, with help from a two-run homer from center fielder Rick Monday. Los Angeles was on its way to play the Philadelphia Phillies in the National League Championship

Series.

1977 NLCS

Game 1 was a battle of the top two finishes in the Cy Young voting. Philadelphia ace Steve Carlton had won the award, easily outpacing runner-up John. But in spite of the pitchers on the mound, it was the bats that would tell the tale in the opener.

With two outs in the top of the first, Dodger shortstop Bill Russell committed an error to keep the inning alive. Phillie left fielder Greg Luzinski, one of the best power hitters in the National League made it costly, with a home run that staked Carlton to a 2-0 lead

The score held through four, when Carlton—who had already singled—was hit by a pitch to lead off the top of the fifth. Bake McBride grounded into a force out and replaced the pitcher on the bases. Russell booted another grounder, and with two outs, Davey Johnson (the future manager of the 1986 New York Mets and elsewhere) hit a two-run single to center. John was chased and the Phils were on top 4-zip.

Los Angeles got to Carlton in the fifth when Lee Lacy hit a one-out single, was balked to second and scored on a base hit by Lopes. But the Phillie pitcher again did it with his bat in the top of the sixth, delivering an RBI single.

Everything was cruising along for the Phils, up 5-1 in the bottom of the seventh. Then two walks and a Lopes single loaded the bases with two outs. Cey came to the plate The Dodger third baseman hit 30 home runs in the regular season and he hit another one now. The grand slam tied the game and sent Carlton to the showers.

Sosa came in on the ninth, but didn't have it. McBride, Larry Bowa and Mike Schmidt all hit consecutive one-out singles that broke the tie, and then a balk brought in an insurance run.

Philadelphia had a 7-5 win. Their time out west was a success no matter what, and the Phils could put an early stranglehold on the series if they won Game 2.

Lasorda turned to Sutton. McBride got him for a home run in the third that gave the Phils a 1-0 lead, and the Dodgers desperately needed to shift momentum. They started doing it immediately in the bottom of the inning, when Monday hit a leadoff double and then scored on a two-out single from Lopes to tie up the game.

Philadelphia had 35-year-old Jim Lonborg on the mound, inconsistent all year, and a long way removed from being the ace of the 1967 Boston Red Sox pennant-winning team. The Dodgers nailed him in the fourth. Russell and Reggie Smith singled, and were bunted over. Garvey took a walk. Then Baker unloaded with LA's second grand slam of the series.



This time, there was no Philadelphia comeback. Sutton was locked in and threw a complete game. Los Angeles got two-out RBI hits from Steve Yeager in the sixth and Reggie Smith in the seventh, wrapping up a 7-1 win that evened the series.

Philadelphia still had the NLCS where they realistically wanted it—down to a best two-of-three at Veterans Stadium for the weekend. They sent Larry Christenson to the mound, while LA countered with Hooton. Neither starter was effective.

Baker continued his hot hitting, with an RBI double in the second, and then scored on a two-out single by Yeager. Hooton ripped a double, but Yeager was thrown out at the plate, keeping the score 2-0. The Phils quickly answered—or, more accurately, Hooton answered for them. With two on and two out, Hooton issued four straight walks, was removed from the game, and just like that it was 3-2 Philadelphia.

Christenson couldn't make it through the fourth. After a Cey double and another RBI single by Baker, the Phillie starter was pulled. With one out and the bases loaded, new Dodger pitcher Rhoden lofted a fly ball to right. McBride made the catch and gunned down Baker at the plate, keeping the score 3-3.

The first four innings of Game 3 had already seen a lot of what-ifs and changes of fortune. And we were just getting started.

In the bottom of the eighth, Sosa came in for Los Angeles and again couldn't get it done. Richie Hebner ripped a double and scored the lead run on a single from Garry Maddox, who went all the way to third on a bad throw. When Cey booted a Bob Boone grounder, Maddox scored and Boone went all the way to second, still no one out. Boone was not able to come around. It didn't seem to matter in the moment, but it would prove to be enormous.

Philadelphia's Gene Garber got the first two outs in the ninth. Lasorda summoned Vic Davalillo to pinch-hit for Yeager. Davalillo was 40-years-old and in August had been playing in Mexico,

out of the majors since 1974 when the Dodgers added him for the stretch drive. The veteran kept Game 3 alive by dropping down a bunt single.

Manny Mota then hit a long double to left. The tying runs were in scoring position, and Lopes singled to center. Stunningly, the game was tied. It got worse. An errant pickoff throw sent Lopes to second base, where he was able to score on a single to center from Russell.

Game 3 is one of the truly underrated gems in LCS history. Because it wasn't a deciding game, and neither team ended up winning the World Series, it gets forgotten. But the comeback was stunning, the Davalillo plot twist inspiring and it was the final momentum reversal in this NLCS.

Carlton and John hooked up again for Game 4, with a light drizzle hitting the field. As the game went on, the rain would become oddly symbolic of the Philadelphia mood. Los Angeles kept their momentum, as Baker hit a two-run shot in the second. The Phils had good chances to score in the second and fourth, with two on and one out. They did get a run in the fourth, but in both cases, Tim McCarver struck out for the second out and John escaped with a 2-1 lead still intact.

Baker started the action again in the fifth, with a leadoff walk and then Yeager singled him to third. With two outs, a wild pitch scored a run and Yeager ended up on third base, where he could score on a bunt single from Russell.

The 4-1 lead was plenty for John. The Phils were able to get the tying run to the plate in the eighth inning, but had the pitcher's spot due up and John got pinch-hitter Jerry Martin to ground out. Los Angeles closed out the game and the series with minimal incident.

Baker was named NLCS MVP, the first time such an honor had been given (the American League would not follow suit until 1980). He had a series on-base percentage of .438, a slugging percentage of .857 and countless key hits, including the Game 2 grand slam that was the first of the two big momentum shifts for his team.

Cey had a good series, at .400/.615 and Lopes always seemed to be around at big times, but Baker was a good choice. Noteworthy in a less positive way was Schmidt for Philadelphia, as he went just 1-for-16.

1977 WORLD SERIES

The New York Yankees and Los Angeles Dodgers were old sparring partners in the World Series. Their eight previous meetings in the Fall Classic were the most of any matchup combination and they had met six times in ten years (1947-56) when the Dodgers were still in Brooklyn. They met again in 1963 after the Dodgers moved west.

The Fall Classic began on a Tuesday night in the Big Apple, where the Yankees held home field advantage by virtue of an AL-NL rotation system.

New York's rotation was shot to pieces after a draining ALCS with the Kansas City Royals and they opened with Don Gullett, who had won 14 games and was a good arm, but not one of the Yankees' best. Los Angeles wasted little time in getting after him.

Lopes led off the Series with a walk and immediately scored on a triple by Russell, who scored himself on a sacrifice fly. The inning might have been worse, with Gullett issuing two more walks, but Yankee catcher Thurman Munson gunned down Reggie Smith trying to steal and the score stayed 2-0.

Los Angeles sent Sutton to the mound. He got the first two batters out, but was quickly peppered by consecutive singles from Munson, Reggie Jackson and Chris Chambliss to cut the lead in half.

The pitchers settled in from there until New York second baseman Willie Randolph homered to tie the game in the sixth. A potential Yankee rally in the seventh was cut off when Smith turned the tables on the Yanks and threw out Lou Piniella trying to stretch a single into a double.

In the eighth, Randolph drew a walk and came around on a Munson double. Jackson drew a walk, and both runners were bunted up. The Yankees had a chance to put the game away, but Sosa came out of the bullpen. The Dodgers' best reliever, outstanding in the regular season, but roughed up in the NLCS, returned to form. He struck out Piniella and got Bucky Dent to escape.

Sosa's keeping it a 3-2 game proved vital, because LA got to New York's Cy Young reliever Sparky Lyle in the ninth. Dusty Baker hit a leadoff single. Steve Yeager drew a walk, and Lee Lacy tied the game 3-3. We were going to extra innings.

Lyle stayed on the mound and redeemed himself with three scoreless innings. It bought enough time for Randolph to get something instigated one more time. He drilled a double to lead off the bottom of the 12th and then scored on a base hit by veteran outfielder Paul Blair. New York's first victory in a World Series game since 1964 was a long time coming, but they had Game 1, 4-3.

New York's Catfish Hunter, once one of the top pitchers in baseball, but now faltering, was the starter for Game 2, and once again the Dodgers jumped out of the gate fast. With two outs in the first, Smith doubled, Cey hit a home run and it was 2-0.

This time, there was no immediate Yankee response. Hooton was outstanding for Los Angeles, tossing a complete-game five-hitter. He got more offensive help when Yeager hit a two-out home run in the third, and Smith drilled a two-run shot in the third.

The Yanks picked up a run in the fourth, but it came off of Jackson grounding into a double play that brought the run in through the backdoor but killed a bigger rally. Los Angeles won 6-1 after Steve Garvey hit one more home run in the ninth.

The World Series was shifting west for three games over the weekend, and it seemed the Dodgers might have the edge. But pitching matters more than home field, and the Yankees

could finally throw two of their top starters, Mike Torrez for Game 3 and Ron Guidry for Game 4. These two pitchers decisively changed the course of the 1977 World Series.

New York continued the trend of the road team pouncing in the top of the first when they scored three runs to open Game 3. Mickey Rivers doubled and scored on another double from Munson. Jackson knocked in Munson with a single, took second on a misplay in left by Baker, and then scored on a single from Piniella.

Torrez had a hiccup in the third inning. With two on and two out, Baker redeemed himself for the error that put Jackson in scoring position. The LA left fielder ripped a three-run shot to tie the game.

But the Dodgers never threatened again. New York quickly got the lead back in the fourth, when Graig Nettles and Bucky Dent each singled, were sacrificed up by Torrez and Rivers drove in a run with a productive ground ball to the right side. In the fifth, Jackson drew a walk, Piniella beat out an infield hit and Chambliss drove in Jackson. Torrez made the 5-3 score stand up.

Guidry got the ball for Saturday afternoon. The 16-game winner was a year away from an amazing 25-win Cy Young season and he gave the Dodgers a foretaste of what was to come in Game 4, with a complete-game four-hitter.

New York staked Guidry to a 3-0 lead in the second. Jackson doubled and scored on a single from Piniella, and then Chambliss doubled. Lasorda wisely did not give starter Doug Rau any rope and he quickly went to Rhoden. But Nettles got an RBI grounder, and then the light-hitting Dent took a single the other way with two outs.

Guidry already had all he needed, though Los Angeles kept it interesting. They picked up two runs in the second on a Rhoden double and a Lopes home run. In the top of the sixth though, Jackson took a home run the other way for New York. It was Jackson's first home run of this World Series and he was most definitely not done. This game was though, as Guidry rolled home to a 4-2 win.

It was tough to find reason for optimism if you were a Dodger fan tuning in on late Sunday afternoon for Game 5. Even if you won, there were still two games in the Bronx. But Los Angeles didn't lay down. In fact, they came out swinging off of Gullett.

Lopes hit a leadoff triple and scored in the first inning, at least allowing his team to play with a lead as they faced elimination. In the bottom of the fourth, Baker hit an RBI single and Yeager ripped a three-run homer.

Sutton was on the mound for Los Angeles and didn't ever let New York off the mat. Before the Yankees could get on the board, the Dodgers had added three more in the fifth to make it 8-0, and then Smith hit a two-run homer in the sixth. New York got four runs off Sutton in the final three innings, including back-to-back homers by Munson and Jackson, but by that point, everyone was mentally flying back to New York already. The Dodgers' 10-4 win had kept the Series alive.

Hooton again got the ball for Los Angeles, hoping to repeat his performance of Game 2. Martin turned to Torrez on three days' rest, though that wasn't nearly as dramatic an issue as it would be today. Los Angeles scored right away. After two were out, Dent booted a grounder, Cey walked and Garvey tripled both in for a 2-0 lead.

In the bottom of the second, Jackson walked on four pitches and Chambliss homered to tie the game. Smith answered right back for the Dodgers with a solo shot in the third. Then the sequence of events this World Series is most remembered for began to unfold. Reggie took it over.

In the bottom of the fourth, after Munson hit a leadoff single, Jackson took the first pitch from Hooton out and New York was ahead 4-3. Chambliss doubled and came around on productive outs by Nettles and Piniella before the inning was over.

In the bottom of the sixth, after a leadoff single from Rivers, two were out and the inning was set to die. Reggie came up, this time facing Sosa. Jackson took the first pitch deep. It was 7-3 and the Yankees could start to taste the champagne.

The score was still 7-3 in the bottom of the eighth. Charlie Hough was on for Los Angeles. Jackson came up. The first pitch was sent out of the yard. Keeping in mind that Jackson's early walk was on four straight pitches, this means he took only three swings on the night—and every one was a home run.

Los Angeles got a run in the ninth and had a runner on first. Pinch-hitter Vic Davalillo beat out a bunt single. After a similar bunt hit had started an improbable rally that turned the NLCS around, one would be loath to dismiss its consequence or any paranoia Yankee fans might have felt, with the tying run now on-deck. Lacy tried to follow suit, but his bunt popped up, Torrez caught it and the World Series was over.

Jackson was named World Series MVP. Normally I'm suspicious in situations like this, where an electric one-game performance overshadows the Series as a whole. But in this case, it's justified. Even if you throw out Game 6, Jackson was still 6-for-17 and had homered twice. Take that, and add one of the great individual performances in World Series history to it, and you have the makings of a Series MVP.

Munson had a strong Series, batting .320 and Torrez had a very strong case for MVP, with two complete game wins, one of them being the momentum-turner in Game 3 and the other being the clincher. I can see the case for Torrez. But Jackson was the right pick.

The New York Yankees had returned to the top of the baseball world. But a new era for the Dodgers had arrived.

1978

Lasorda made it 2-for-2 on pennants, pulling away to win the NL West on the strength of a dynamite September.

The Dodgers were a complete team, the best in the National League in both hitting and pitching. They made only modest changes to the roster, replacing Sosa with Terry Forster in the closer's role. Otherwise, the component parts of the 1977 NL champs were back.

Reggie Smith was the best-all around offensive threat, playing right field and finishing with a stat line of .382 on-base percentage/.559 slugging percentage. Smith hit 29 home runs and finished with 93 RBIs. Others weren't far behind. Garvey had 113 RBIs and batted .316 at first base. Cey hit 23 home runs at third base.

Lopes was at the top of the order and the second baseman had an OBP of .355 and swiped 45 bases. Monday and Lacy were productive outfielders in more limited roles. Even with a down year from Baker and Yeager, the Dodgers had plenty of muscle.

The starting rotation was balanced, with Hooton enjoying the best year, as he won 19 games and finished with 2.71 ERA. Sutton and John combined for 32 wins and ERAs in the 3s. Rau was a solid fourth starter, 15-9 with a 3.26 ERA.

Rhoden filled out the rotation with ten wins and an ERA in the 3s, and the team broke in 21-year-old Bob Welch. The power righthander made 13 starts, finished with a 2.02 ERA and would be a part of one of the most memorable confrontations in World Series history before the season was over.

Los Angeles was steady, if unspectacular in the beginning of the year. They were 26-19 on Memorial Day, trailing the San Francisco Giants and Cincinnati Reds, but within 3 ½ games of the NL West lead. The Dodger record was 50-36 by the All-Star break, moving them past Cincinnati, but still a couple games back of San Francisco.

Early August was a problem. A road trip to San Diego and San Francisco went poorly, with five losses in seven games, and the Dodgers fell as many as six games back. They stopped the bleeding when the Giants made a return trip to SoCal, as the teams split a four-game set. Then the Dodgers righted the ship, with an 8-4 stretch against the NL East, including five wins in seven games against the eventual East winner, the Philadelphia Phillies.

In the latter part of August, Los Angeles got a hold of first place, and on Labor Day they were clinging to a one-game lead on San Francisco, with Cincinnati drifting out of the race, 6 ½ games back. The Giants were coming to Dodger Stadium for a key three-game series starting on the holiday.

Sutton got the ball for the Labor Day opener and was hit early, digging his team a 4-0 hole. But the veteran calmed down and Monday led off the fifth inning with a home run, triggering a five-run inning. The 5-4 score stood up, as middle reliever Lance Rautzhan got seven big outs, and Forster nailed down the final five for the save.

The Giants answered with a win on Tuesday, but the Dodgers took the series with a blowout on Wednesday. Cey went 3-for-3 with a home run, as did backup catcher Joe Ferguson. Los

Angeles won that game 9-2 to at least get a small amount of room to breathe. Then they took over the race.

The Dodgers won eight of their next ten, and dominated a two-game set up in San Francisco. They won the games 7-2 and 8-0, the latter being a shutout by Rau. He had also won the rubber match out in Los Angeles earlier. The name "Doug Rau" doesn't ring out in history like Sutton or John, but Rau won some important games for these excellent Dodger teams of the late 1970s.

Los Angeles was soaring and by September 16, they were up nine games. It took less than two weeks for a race that had been tight all year to be blown open. The Dodgers clinched on the penultimate Sunday of the year, with Welch shutting out San Diego to put the icing on the cake.

The final standings look close only because the Dodgers mailed it in for the final week, giving back five games in the standings and finishing with a margin of 2 ½. But they were headed back to the NLCS for a rematch with the Phillies.

1978 NLCS

The NLCS opened in Philadelphia. The rotation system called for two games at old Veterans Stadium on Wednesday and Thursday night, followed by the balance of the series over the weekend at Dodger Stadium.

Philadelphia had gone to the season's penultimate day before clinching, so their ace Steve Carlton, was out of commission until Friday. The Phils instead turned to Larry Christensen to pitch the first game against Hooton. It didn't go well for Christensen.

The Phils were able to score first, with Greg Luzinski tripled in the second inning and scored on a sac fly from Mike Schmidt, but in the third, the Dodgers broke through. Lopes led off with a double. Schmidt booted a grounder off the bat of Russell. Reggie Smith tied the game with an RBI single and Garvey unloaded with a three-run shot. It was 4-1 and Los Angeles was on its way.

LA added a run in the fourth when Monday hit a leadoff triple. Christensen got the next two outs and looked like he might escape, when Lopes homered. Somehow the Phillie starter was still in the game for the fifth inning, as though manager Danny Ozark was unaware that starters can't just chew up innings as though this were the middle of August. Garvey tripled and scored to make it 7-1.

The decision to let Christensen continue (he came out after the Garvey triple) looked worse when Philadelphia got its offense going in the fifth. Four singles with one out produced two runs and had runners on first and second. Luzinski popped out, but Richie Hebner drove in a run with a single that made it 7-4.

Schmidt was coming to the plate as the tying run, but Lasorda managed the game with an appropriate amount of urgency. He pulled Hooton, brought in Welch, and Welch got Schmidt to

fly to center. Los Angeles got solo home runs from Yeager in the sixth and Garvey in the eighth, winning the game 9-5.

Dick Ruthven won 13 games for Philadelphia after coming over in a June trade and his team's hopes were on his shoulders for Game 2, facing John.

Ruthven and John traded zeroes for three innings on Thursday night, when Lopes hit a solo shot to start the top of the fourth.

Baker hit a leadoff double for the Dodgers to start the fifth and scored on a single from Yeager. The LA catcher then stole second base and scored on a two-out single from Lopes. Ruthven was gone and the score was 3-0.

Lopes made yet another mark on the game, hitting a two-out triple in the seventh to drive in Monday. Meanwhile, John was dominating with his sinker. The only remote Philly threat came in the seventh, with leadoff singles from Garry Maddox and Luzinski, but John promptly got Bob Boone to hit into a double play. The Dodger starter allowed just four hits—all singles—and two walks—in a 4-0 shutout.

Philadelphia's odds were long, needing three straight road wins but they didn't nail it in and they had Carlton on the mound. Los Angeles had Sutton, but this time it was the Phillies who attacked early and often.

Schmidt doubled with two outs in the top of the second. After Tim McCarver drew a walk, light-hitting second baseman Ted Sizemore singled in a run. Carlton, a good-hitting pitcher, jacked a three run bomb and it was 4-0.



Los Angeles got something going in the bottom of the inning, as Cey and Baker walked, and Russell doubled them in. But with runners on second and third and one out, Carlton struck out Yeager and got Sutton to kill the threat with just one run.

The Dodgers further chipped away in the third. With two outs, a sequence of a Reggie Smith single, a Garvey double and Cey single produced two runs and it was a 4-3 game.

But Philadelphia had a two-out rally of their own waiting. In the sixth, Lopes committed an error and the Phils made him pay. Sizemore singled, and Carlton drove in both runs with a base hit of his own, chasing Sutton. Jerry Martin, a good pinch-hitter, doubled for a 7-3 lead. The Phils added a run in the seventh, Garvey and Luzinski traded solo home runs and Philly was still breathing with a 9-4 win.

The sun splashed over Dodger Stadium on Saturday afternoon for Game 4, as the home team sent Rau to the mound to face Philly lefty Randy Lerch, who had pitched the clinching game of the NL East race and hit two home runs in the process.

Philadelphia fans got a bad omen early—they loaded the bases with none out, but Luzinski struck out. Then Jose Cardenal hit a line drive right at the shortstop Russell. They got no runs, and in the second, the Dodgers got on the board with a double from Cey and an RBI single from Baker.

Luzinski made amends in the third, hitting a two-out two-run homer for a 2-1 lead. Cey answered with a solo home run and Garvey went deep in the bottom of the sixth. It was 3-2 Dodgers and they were nine outs from a pennant. But with Rhoden on in relief of Rau, the Phils' Bake McBride picked his team off the mat with a two-out solo home run in the seventh to tie the game 3-3.

Garvey led off the eighth with a single, but was gunned down stealing by Boone. The out negated a pair of two-out singles. But Rhoden, in spite of the home run, was pitching well and turned in four solid innings. The game went to the 10th, a battle between Forster and Philly reliever Tug McGraw.

There were two outs in the bottom of the tenth when Cey drew a walk. It looked harmless enough when Baker lofted a fly ball to centerfield. Maddox, a top defensive center fielder, muffed the ball. Russell then hit a line drive single to center and Cey came flying in with the run that won the pennant.

Garvey was named 1978 NLCS MVP, hitting .389 for the series, with four home runs and seven RBIs. It's tough to argue against anyone with those numbers, but Lopes also hit .389 (7-for-18), drove in five runs and controlled Game 2, the game in which the pendulum of the series decisively swung. Of note on the other side was that Schmidt continued what was now a pattern of postseason non-performance, batting .200.

The Dodgers had won one postseason rematch. It was time for another. The Yankees were waiting.

1978 WORLD SERIES

The 1978 World Series was a rerun, and one the networks were happy to carry, as the two biggest markets were again on center stage. The Series opened on a Tuesday night in Dodger Stadium. John was on the mound for Los Angeles, while New York answered with 20-game winner Ed Figueroa. But Figueroa had pitched poorly in his ALCS start, the one game the Yankees lost in that series, and Game 1 of the World Series was no different.

Los Angeles got going in the bottom of the second when Baker homered. Monday then blooped a double into left-center and Lacy drew a walk. It looked like Figueroa might get out of it, when he got a double play ball, but Lopes promptly hit the first pitch into the left field bleachers for a 3-0 Dodger lead. Lopes then added to the misery in the fourth, when a walk and an error set up his three-run shot off reliever Ken Clay.

The game ended 11-5, but New York never made it close. They didn't score until it was 7-0 and each team traded three-spots in the seventh. The Yankees picked up a couple meaningless runs in the eighth.

Game 2 was much better, and produced one of the World Series' most memorable confrontations. The Yanks got on the board first off of Hooton when Roy White singled, Thurman Munson drew a two-out walk and Reggie Jackson pulled a double down the right field line to score both runs. The Dodgers got a run back in the fourth, but a double play ball off the bat of Baker killed a bigger inning.



Yankee veteran Catfish Hunter was on the mound and he took a 2-1 lead into the sixth. Lopes and Reggie Smith each singled with one out, and then Cey hit a three-run homer to left for a 4-2 Dodger lead. The Yankees cut that lead in half in the seventh, getting runners to second and third. Jackson drove in a run with a groundout, but Los Angeles maintained its 4-3 lead.

Bucky Dent singled for New York in the ninth and Paul Blair worked a one-out walk. Welch came on, bringing his heat to face the muscle in the Yankee order. Welch got Thurman Munson to fly out and then came his epic battle with Jackson.

The count went full. Jackson repeatedly kept fouling balls off. It was the veteran of October and MVP of the previous year's Series, facing the kid. On the ninth pitch, Welch reared back one more time. Jackson swung and missed. Dodger Stadium exploded. Los Angeles had a 2-0 Series lead.

Only once had a team come from 0-2 down to win a World Series and that was 1955—these same two franchises when the Dodgers, then in Brooklyn, won a seven-game set with the Yankees. At least New York was going home and had their ace, 25-game winner Ron Guidry on the mound.

Mickey Rivers singled to lead off the Yankee first, but was promptly caught stealing. Roy White finally got momentum going for the Pinstripes when he homered. In the second inning, a pair of walks issued by Sutton led to productive ground ball outs from Brian Doyle and Bucky Dent, the light-hitting middle infield combo, and it was 2-zip.

The Dodgers manufactured a run off Guidry when veteran outfielder Bill North singled, stole second and scored on a base hit from Russell. They were poised to get more when Yankee third baseman Graig Nettles saved the Series.

LA loaded the bases in the fifth with two outs. Steve Garvey ripped a shot down the third base line. Nettles speared it and got the force out at second. The Dodgers loaded the bases in the sixth. Lopes ripped a liner down the third base line. Nettles did the same thing. He had saved at

least four, and perhaps five runs. The Yankees got three runs in the seventh to put the game away and with the 5-1 final, it was a Series again.

Game 4 was on Saturday afternoon, and proved to be a very good back-and-forth game, replete with controversy. It started with great plays in right field on both sides. Los Angeles had two on and a man aboard against Figueroa. Garvey hit a line drive to right field. Lou Piniella made the catch and then doubled off Bill Russell at first to kill the rally. Then New York had runners at the corners when Thurman Munson hit a fly ball to Reggie Smith in right. The Dodger right fielder gunned Paul Blair at the plate. The first inning ended scoreless.

The Dodgers broke through in the fifth when Yeager doubled, Lopes walked and then Smith drilled a three-run shot for a 3-0 lead. It was the sixth inning when the Yankees started to rally against John. With one out, White singled, Munson walked and Jackson singled to drive in a run. Then the controversy broke out.

Piniella hit a soft liner to Russell. The Dodger shortstop was near second base and alertly let the ball hit his glove and drop so he could turn an inning-ending double play. He touched second base and threw to first. But Jackson was standing in the way, not moving and appeared to maneuver his hip to get in the way of the throw. The ball bounced away and a run scored.

Lasorda argued furiously that Jackson was guilty of interference and he got support from the NBC broadcast crew calling the game, but the play stood and the lead was now 3-2.

In the bottom of the eighth, with Forster in the game for John, Blair singled and was bunted over by White. Munson drove in the tying run with a double. After Jackson was plunked, Forster got Piniella to fly out and the game ended up going to extra innings.

With two outs, New York started the winning rally. White walked. Jackson, appropriately enough involved in the final drama, singled. Piniella singled to center and the World Series was tied two games apiece.

Los Angeles could still turn to Hooton to regain momentum, while New York turned to Jim Beattie, a young righthander. The Dodgers touched Beattie early. Lopes singled to lead off the game, stole second and scored on a base hit by Smith. Lopes again singled in the third and scored, this time on a double by Russell.

But Beattie had won a big division race game against the Boston Red Sox and the opener of the ALCS against the Kansas City Royals. He was young, but he was now battle-tested. He settled down and Los Angeles collapsed.

In the third, four singles, a walk, combined with a double steal by Rivers and White produced four runs for New York. In the fourth, another four singles produced a three-spot. In the seventh, three singles, a passed ball, a wild pitch and a double by Munson produced four more runs. The final was 12-2, with the Yankees literally pecking the Dodgers to death.

Los Angeles still had two games at home to look forward to, although New York knew they had Guidry in their back pocket for Game 7 if it came to that. It didn't. Lopes again tried to lift his team, homering in the first, but Sutton couldn't stop the Yankee lineup.

The top of the second saw Nettles single, then a walk was followed by a game-tying double from Doyle and a two-run single by Dent. The Dodgers picked up a run in the third, but a double play ground ball induced by Hunter kept the Yankee lead at 3-2.

It was still close in the sixth when Piniella hit a leadoff single. With two outs, he moved up on a wild pitch and Doyle drove him in. A bad decision to throw the ball to the plate allowed Doyle to move up to second where he scored on a single from Dent.

The score was 5-2 and with closer Goose Gossage still in reserve, the game didn't seem in a whole lot of doubt, but Reggie made sure to put the finishing touches on. He came to the plate with White aboard in the seventh and homered to right. The pitcher on the mound? None other than Welch. Reggie knew how to answer.

Game 6 ended with a 7-2 final and another Yankee title. In a Series where the Yankees peck-peck-peck attack had reigned, it was appropriate that Dent was the MVP. The light-hitting shortstop had gone 10-for-24 and driven in seven runs. Doyle was 7-for-26, while Jackson and Munson each had big Series as well. But Dent was the appropriate choice.

New York had a repeat title. Los Angeles had enjoyed another great year, but this Fall Classic was tough to swallow.

1980

Los Angeles took a step back in 1979 when they struggled to a 79-83 finish. Lasorda's team was aggressive in the free agent market.

They signed Dave Goltz, a recent 20-game winner with the Twins, and the Dodgers added closer Don Stanhouse, fresh off a trip to the World Series in Baltimore. In the end though, the big money newcomers flamed out and it was the Old Guard that simply bounced back and got the franchise back on track.

While Goltz struggled to 7-11 and a 4.31 ERA, veteran lefty Jerry Reuss went 18-6 with a 2.51 ERA. Don Sutton posted a 13-5 mark and a sparkling 2.20 ERA. Burt Hooton, went 14-8 with a 3.66 ERA. And young Bob Welch delivered 14 more wins and a 3.29 ERA. All four core starters worked over 200 innings.

The bullpen lacked depth, but in an era when complete games were much more common, this wasn't a fatal flaw. And Lasorda had a solid closer in Steve Howe and a reliable middle man in Bobby Castillo. When all was said and done, the Los Angeles staff was second in the National League in ERA.

Offensively, the Dodgers led the league in home runs. Steve Garvey, Ron Cey and Dusty Baker combined for 81 home runs, while Reggie Smith finished with a slugging percentage of .508.

Other offensive contributors included Davey Lopes, who could still run at age 35 and swiped 23 bases. Three quality veterans came off the bench in outfielders Jay Johnstone and Rick Monday, along with catcher Joe Ferguson. All finished with on-base percentages between .353 and .372. And 24-year-old Pedro Guerrero, soon to be a big-time player, got nearly 200 at-bats and put up a .359 OBP/.497 slugging percentage.

Los Angeles' offense wasn't always patient, finishing below the league average in walks. But the power was enough to place them sixth in the 12-team National League in runs scored and combined with the pitching staff that was more than enough to compete.

The season picked up where 1979 had ended, and that was playing poorly. The Dodgers lost six of seven to the Astros, the lowlight of a 3-7 start. Then Los Angeles turned around and won ten in a row. Which was immediately followed by losing five of six, which was subsequently followed by a 10-1 run.

By Memorial Day, the Dodgers had more ups and downs under their belt than most teams would have in a season. But they were in first place at 25-15. Cincinnati, who won the NL West in '79, was three games back. Houston and San Diego were each 3 ½ games out.

The early summer was a little more stable, but there was still a 2-6 stretch in early June and the Dodgers slipped as many as three games back. They got on a little four-game win streak right before the All-Star break. The midseason festivities were held in Los Angeles this season and the Dodgers were in a virtual tie for first with the Astros. The Reds were 4 ½ out and the Padres had fallen off the map.

After two quick wins at home over Houston to start the second half, Los Angeles hit the skids hard again, dropping 11 of 16. They were 3 ½ games out and after treading water until August 19, got on their biggest hot streak of this streaky season. They ripped off 17 wins in 20 games, including a 7-0 mark against a good Montreal Expos team that fought to the final weekend in the NL East.

Los Angeles rolled into Labor Day back on top of the NL West, two games ahead of Houston and plus-five on Cincinnati. The Dodgers faced both rivals the week after the holiday. They gave away the lead with two straight losses in Houston, but responded with a three-game sweep in Cincinnati. Los Angeles was back in a first-place tie, but at least the race seemed to be finally narrowing to just two teams.

At least until the following week. The Dodgers hosted the Reds, who returned the favor by coming into LA and delivering a road sweep. Los Angeles went 2-5 on the week. The good news was they were only a game back of Houston, while Cincinnati had new life, within 3 ½ games of the lead.

Los Angeles then failed to take advantage of a soft schedule week, where they played seven games against the also-ran Braves, Giants and Padres. The Dodgers only went 3-4, slipping two games back of Houston. The Reds were still lurking at 3 ½ out when the final week began.

A series victory over San Francisco eliminated Cincinnati, because the final weekend saw the Dodgers and Astros going head-to-head. But Houston extended the lead to three games. If there was a tie for first, the one-game playoff would be in Los Angeles, so the stakes were very simple for the Dodgers—they had to win four straight home games over Houston, the three regular season games to tie and the playoff to finish the job.

Los Angeles was two outs from elimination on Friday night, trailing 2-1 and seemingly ready to waste a clutch outing from Sutton. With one out, Monday singled and then moved up on an error. With two outs, Cey was the last hope. He singled to tie the game and in the 10th inning, Ferguson homered to win it.

The Dodgers were also saved in that game by some clutch relief work from a Mexican kid who would not pitch enough innings in 1980 for it to qualify as his rookie year. Fernando Valenzuela tossed a couple shutout innings and laid the groundwork for what was to come.

Reuss and Nolan Ryan hooked up in another pitcher's duel on Saturday and Reuss got the better of it, winning 2-1 and extending the race one more day. On Sunday afternoon, Hooton got the ball and struggled. Los Angeles trailed 3-0 after four innings. Castillo, Valenzuela and Howe held down the fort and the Dodgers chipped back to within 3-2 in the eighth, but time was running out.

Again, they came back and again Cey was a hero. After Garvey reached on an error, Cey homered. The Astros put the tying run on third in the ninth, but Howe preserved the 4-3 win. This miracle push still had life and it would come down to one game on Monday afternoon.

The mistakes off the offseason finally bit the Dodgers here. Goltz was the only one left who could pitch and he had nothing, digging a quick 4-0 hole and this time there was no comeback. Los Angeles lost 7-1 and the season was over.

It was still a bounceback year for the 1980 Los Angeles Dodgers, as the organization showed its resiliency after 1979 and these individual players showed their toughness throughout the roller coaster ride of a season. And one year later that all paid off.

1981

Tom Lasorda had known constant success since taking over as manager. But Tommy was still looking for his first ring, and the proud franchise was after its first title since 1965. The 1981 Los Angeles Dodgers were the breakthrough team.

Los Angeles had a balanced team in 1981, ranking fourth in the National League in both runs scored and ERA. They got good years from veteran hitters, like Baker and Cey. There were veteran pitchers, like Reuss and Hooton that gave steady work.

There were disappointing seasons from other vets, such as Garvey, Russell and Lopes. The Dodgers had also, prior to the season, parted ways with Sutton via free agency.

It meant some transition and younger players stepped up to produce. Pedro Guerrero got the right field job and finished with a .365 on-base percentage/.464 slugging percentage. Steveposted a 2.50 ERA.in the closer's role.



But no young player impacted the team, the region—or indeed the entire nation, like Fernando Valenzuela.

He was 20-years-old, a chunky left-handed pitcher from Mexico. When he made the kick to start his motion, his eyes cast towards the sky, making for a memorable visual. He won his first eight starts, finished with a 13-7 record and 2.48 ERA and won the Cy Young Award. “Fernando” became a phenomenon, needing only his first name for identification.

You may have noted Fernando's 13 wins and thought that it seems a little low for a Cy Young season. That's because 1981 was a shortened year, due to a players' strike that went from mid-June to mid-August and meant there were only 100-plus games played. Though no one knew it at the time, the early season games had to be played with pennant-race urgency.

Los Angeles came storming out of the gate to a 14-3 start. They swept the Houston Astros, then went 7-2 on a road trip that covered San Francisco, San Diego and Houston.

A road trip to play the Montreal Expos and Philadelphia Phillies, the powers of the NL East, produced a 4-3 record, and the Dodgers then swept a home series with Montreal, getting two walk off wins—victories that would prove to be foreshadowing.

The Dodgers had a 5 ½ game lead going into June, but a 2-6 stretch saw that lead dwindle to a half-game on June 11. Los Angeles was 36-21 while the Cincinnati Reds were 35-21. It was a fortunate schedule that allowed Los Angeles an extra game, because at that point, the strike hit.

When the strike was settled MLB decided to just declare the four teams leading their divisions at the strike to be “first-half champions.” For the first time in its history, MLB created the Division Series round, and it would pit the winners of the first half against the winners of the second half in a best-of-five to determine the division champion. That extra game the Dodgers played were the difference in locking up their playoff spot.

It also meant that Los Angeles had nothing to play for after the strike. Even if they won the second half, they would still have to play the post-strike runner-up in the Division Series. The Dodgers played with more enthusiasm than most other first-half winners, and were tied for first as late as September 19, but the urgency the Astros and Reds had proved decisive and it was those teams that fought to the end for the right to get into the Division Series. It was Houston that survived and it was time for another Dodgers-Astros showdown for a division title.

1981 NLDS

The series opened in Houston for the first two games and would then go to Los Angeles for the balance of the set.

Valenzuela took the mound for the Dodgers against the veteran Nolan Ryan and neither pitcher disappointed. No one even threatened until the bottom of the sixth. With two outs, the Astros got a single from Terry Puhl, a walk by Phil Garner and an RBI base hit from Tony Scott for a 1-0 lead. But the Dodgers immediately countered in the seventh with Garvey's two-out solo home run to tie it.

Houston missed a chance in their own half of the seventh when Cesar Cedeno doubled and stole third to begin the frame. Two flyball outs were too short to get the run home and Fernando escaped.

Valenzuela was pinch-hit for in the eighth. The move made sense—it was to lead off the inning and the player off the bench was Jay Johnstone, a good hitter even before he made his 1989 cameo appearance in *The Naked Gun*. But it didn't produce a run, and Los Angeles turned to 24-year-old Dave Stewart to continue the game.

Stewart got the first two outs, but light-hitting Craig Reynolds singled. The Astros weren't a team noted for home runs in the deep expanse of the Astrodome, but they got one here—Alan Ashby homered and Houston took the opener 3-1.

The names changed on the mound for Game 2, with Reuss for the Dodgers and Joe Niekro for the Astros. But the results didn't change. The pitchers kept dominating. Nothing even resembling a threat happened until the seventh, when Lopes doubled to lead off and was bunted to third. But Niekro got Baker and Garvey to ground out, and the game went to extra innings scoreless.

It went to the 11th inning and the Dodgers again went to Stewart. By the end of the decade, Stewart would be renowned as one of baseball's great big-game pitchers. Right now, he was still learning, and Garner and Scott each touched him for singles and there were runners on the corners.

Veteran Terry Forster was summoned to create a lefty-lefty matchup with Jose Cruz. Forster got Cruz on a fly ball too short to pick up the run. Lasorda again made a pitching change, calling in Tom Niedenfuer to deal with the right-handed Art Howe.

Niedenfuer got a strike out and the Dodgers were poised to escape. But Denny Walling—a lefty hitter, with no response move left for Lasorda—singled to right and Houston was one win from the NL West title.

The Dodgers played like a desperate team in front of their home fans for Game 3 and wasted little time getting after Astro lefty Bob Knepper. Lopes walked and was bunted up to start the

game. Baker doubled the run in, and then Garvey unloaded with a home run. It was 3-0 and that was all Hooton needed.

Houston got a solo shot from Art Howe in the third, but never scored again. Knepper settled in, but in the eighth, Los Angeles broke it open with four singles that produced three wins. The series had its first drama-free ending as the Dodgers stayed alive 6-1.

Valenzuela was back on three days' rest. The Astros, with breathing room, went to their #4 starter Vern Ruhle, although we should note that the Houston rotation was deep and Ruhle, while not having the career of a Ryan or Niekro, was at or close to their level in 1981. And he pitched like it matching Fernando with goose eggs for four innings.

Los Angeles finally broke through in the fifth, with Pedro Guerrero hit a two-out homer. It stayed 1-0 into the seventh when Garvey singled, was bunted up and scored on another big two-out hit, this one a single from Bill Russell.

Houston made a little noise in the ninth, when Puhl doubled. With two outs, Scott kept the game alive with a single that got the Astros a run. But Jose Cruz fouled out. This series was going to a Game 5.

Nolan Ryan had the best year of his career in 1981 and it was left to him to try and save the Astros, with Reuss pitching for the Dodgers. It was another pitchers' duel—Ryan escaped a jam in the third when he got Baker to pop out with one out and Lopes on third—but the game went to the sixth inning scoreless.

Los Angeles broke through when Baker drew a one-out walk and Garvey singled, setting up runners on the corners. With two outs, Rick Monday singled for the game's first run. It was all Reuss was going to need, but the Dodgers got more. Mike Scioscia singled in another run, and then an error brought in a third run.

The Houston bats, never very good to begin with, were completely silent and they never put together anything that could be called a serious threat. Garvey tripled in an insurance run in the seventh and with their 4-0 win, Los Angeles had made history. It was the first time a team had won a best-of-five series after losing the first two.

Major league baseball has never given an official Division Series MVP award, either then or after this round was permanently instituted in the realignment of 1994. It's an omission I think should be rectified, and that's what we'll do here.

There's three worthwhile candidates for the Dodgers. Garvey went 7-for-19 and homered twice. In a series that was starving for offense that certainly stands out. But it seems to me that since Houston only scored six runs in five games and Los Angeles starters worked deep into games, perhaps we should look at the starting rotation.

That leads us to Valenzuela and Reuss. Fernando worked 17 innings, allowed just one run and won Game 4. But Reuss was even better—18 innings, no runs and a shutout against Ryan in the decisive Game 5. I'd take Reuss for this honor.

Both Division Series in the National League had followed a similar pattern. The old guard--the Dodgers and Phillies had fallen behind on the road, then forced a Game 5 at home. But while Los Angeles finished their comeback, Philadelphia was ultimately derailed by the Montreal Expos. The NLCS would feature one of the game's oldest and proudest franchises against one of its up-and-comers.

1981 NLCS

Each team had used its aces to survive the Division Series, but each had deep rotations, so Hooton and Montreal's Bill Gullickson were both quality starters coming off good years. And for eight innings in Game 1, they staged a pitchers' duel.

Los Angeles got on the board in the second, with a leadoff single from Garvey, an RBI double from Ron Cey, and after Cey moved to third, Bill Russell bunted him in. The 2-0 lead stood into the eighth, with neither team threatening in the intervening innings.

With two outs, and Montreal closer Jeff Reardon in the game, Cey's single was followed by back-to-back home runs off the bats of Pedro Guerrero and Mike Scoscia. Montreal picked up a run in the ninth, but never put the outcome in doubt. The Dodgers claimed Game 1, 5-1.

The Expos now had to beat Valenzuela. Ray Burris wasn't quite as renowned, but the Montreal starter had a good year in 1981 and in Game 2, he was outstanding.

Montreal's Larry Parrish and Jerry White singled with one out in the second. A double from Warren Cromartie made it 1-0 and left runners on second and third. After a walk to Chris Speier, Valenzuela struck out Burris and was poised to escape without further damage. But Tim Lincecum hit a two-out single to right. Cromartie tried to score a third run, but was thrown out at the plate by Guerrero.

Still, it was 2-0 and that was more than enough for Burris. Montreal added a run in the sixth when Andre Dawson and Gary Carter hit consecutive singles and an error in the outfield by Baker brought Dawson around. The Dodgers never mounted a threat until the ninth. They put two on with one out, and Guerrero ripped a line drive. But it went at the shortstop Speier, who doubled Cey off second. Ballgame, and the 3-0 win tied the series.

Friday night in Montreal produced more good pitching, this time with Expo ace Steve Rogers on the mound facing Reuss. The game was scoreless through three, and Los Angeles scraped out a run in the fourth. Baker and Garvey each singled, with Baker advancing to third, and then being picked up on a ground ball from Cey.

Reuss kept it 1-0 until there were two outs in the sixth. Montreal struck suddenly. Dawson singled and Carter walked. Parrish singled to tie the game and then White launched a three-run homer. It was 4-1 in a series that made a three-run lead seem insurmountable.

And it basically was. Los Angeles didn't threaten until the ninth, when Garvey and Cey singled and gave Guerrero a chance as the tying run with none out. Guerrero hit a ground ball at Parrish, who touched third and threw to first to complete a double play. Rogers struck out Scioscia and Montreal was a win away from their first pennant.

Both rotations put starters on short rest, and it was a Hooton-Gullickson rematch on three days' rest for Game 4. Los Angeles threatened in the second, but Scioscia grounded into a double play to kill the rally. Then each team's third baseman made an error to let in a run. Parrish booted one in the third and an RBI double by Baker put LA on top. Cey returned the favor with an error in the fourth, and after a walk, Cromartie singled to tie it back up.

Hooton and Gullickson stayed in control. The Dodgers threatened in the sixth with runners on the corners and none out. A grounder went at Parrish, who came home with it and cut Baker down at the plate. The game stayed 1-1 into the eighth.

Baker worked a walk, and then Garvey delivered. A two-run blast gave Los Angeles the lead. Montreal put two runners on with one out in their own half of the eighth, and Hooton was lifted for Bob Welch. The hard-throwing Welch quelled the threat and kept the game 3-1.

The Expo bullpen fell completely apart in the ninth, with Woodie Fryman, Elias Sosa and Bill Lee combining to give up five singles two walks and allowing four runs. The 7-1 final didn't reflect how tense the game had been, but it set up Game 5 on Sunday.

Snow poured out over Montreal on Sunday and the game was postponed. As one of the many examples of how the game was changed, the decisive game for the pennant was not shown in prime-time. The World Series was due to start in New York the next night, and presumably to allow more travel time, the teams played a day game when people were at work (or in the case of this then-11-year-old, in school).

Burris and Valenzuela rematched, now on full rest after the snow-out. Each pitcher again dominated. Both teams threatened in the first. Burris escaped a one-out triple by Russell when he got Baker and Garvey. Valenzuela allowed a double to Raines, and then off a sac bunt, an attempt to cut Raines down at third failed. Dawson hit into a double play, but Raines came in through the back door and it was 1-0.

The score held until the fifth, when Fernando helped himself. After Rick Monday and Guerrero singled, and then the pitcher hit a ground ball out that brought Monday home to tie the game. It wouldn't be the last time Monday was heard from.

Pitching continued to dominate when Montreal manager Jim Fanning made a fatal decision. With one out in the bottom of the eighth, and no one on base, he lifted Burris. Not only that, but the manager, not trusting his bullpen, went to Rogers on two days' rest.

After the eighth predictably ended with no runs, Rogers got the first two men out and Monday came to the plate. He turned on a pitch and it ended over the right-centerfield fence. The Expos tried to rally with two outs in their own half of the ninth, with Carter and Parrish getting walks off Valenzuela. Welch again came on and got a ground ball out from White to seal the pennant.

Monday on Monday—the walk-off home run on this odd Monday afternoon became one of the great moments of NLCS history. It's worth second-guessing the removal of Burris. There was no threat and if he even gets you through the top of the ninth—a reasonable assumption given Burris' complete domination of LA in this series—Montreal could have tried to win it with the top of the order.

Monday was the hero of the moment, but Hooton was the hero of the series. With his two terrific wins, including the must-win Game 4, Hooton was named NLCS MVP.

A familiar foe was waiting. For the third time in five years, it was Dodgers-Yankees in the World Series.

1981 WORLD SERIES

It was the American League's turn for home field advantage on the rotation system. Reuss went to the mound in Yankee Stadium for Game 1. Ron Guidry took the mound for New York.

The Yankees continued a pattern, established in the ALCS, of getting out quickly. Jerry Mumphrey singled with one out in the first. Lou Piniella hit a ground-rule double and with two outs, Bob Watson went deep for a quick 3-0 lead. Reuss was chased in the third when Mumphrey again singled with one out, stole second and scored on a two-out hit by Piniella.

The Los Angeles bullpen had control problems, and Castillo walked four straight batters to make it 5-0 New York. Goltz came on for the Dodgers and finally brought some steadiness to the mound. And the offense began to chip its way back.

Yeager homered in the fifth to put Los Angeles on the board. In the eighth, two walks, a single and a passed ball set up two runs and the Dodgers had two chances with the tying run at the plate in a 5-3 game. New York manager Bob Lemon called on closer Goose Gossage to try and get Garvey and Cey. The Goose did it, although Garvey hit a line drive out.

The ninth inning went without incident on the scoreboard and the Yankees won 5-3, but there was a big incident on the field. Nettles made a diving stop, the kind he had tormented Los Angeles with in the 1978 World Series. In the process he broke his thumb. Nettles had been MVP of the American League Championship Series sweep over the Oakland A's and while he played Game 2, he would miss the next three games after that. And he wouldn't make the same contribution with his bat when he was in the lineup.

Hooton got the ball in Game 2, matched up with former Dodger teammate, now in Pinstripes, Tommy John.

John and Hooton matched zeroes for four innings and the Yankees got a soft run in the fifth—an error by Lopes and a sac bunt from John allowed Larry Milbourne to pick up the RBI with a two-out double.

The score stayed 1-0 into the bottom of the seventh when the Yankees loaded the bases with one out. Hooton was removed for Forster, who got Milbourne to ground into a double play. But one inning later, the Dodgers couldn't escape another jam.

Piniella and Nettles each singled off Howe. Watson drove in a run with a base hit and a later error on a pickup throw moved runners up and allowed Willie Randolph to make it 3-0 with a sac fly. New York closed out a Game 2 win and was in command.

Los Angeles turned to Fernando to try and turn the World Series around, while New York had its own young talent in Dave Righetti. Playing in front of their home fans, this time it was the Dodgers who got on the attack right away.

Lopes lead off the bottom of the first with a double and Russell beat out a bunt. After Baker and Garvey each missed chances to drive in the run, Cey came to the plate. Cey launched a three-run blast and Los Angeles had momentum.

But New York came right back. Watson homered to start the second, Rick Cerone doubled and Larry Milbourne drove Cerone in with a single. In the top of the third, Piniella singled and Cerone went deep. It was 4-3 and the Dodgers then missed a big opportunity. They put two on with none out, chasing Righetti. George Frazier came into the game and escaped the jam.

The Yankees still had the lead and after World Series losses to the Pinstripes in both 1977 and 1978, Dodger fans had to be wondering if this would ever turn around. In the bottom of the fifth, it did.

Garvey beat out an infield hit, Cey drew a walk and Guerrero slashed a double to tie it up. After an intentional walk, Frazier got a double-play groundout, but the lead run came through the backdoor.



The Yankees had one more rally in the eighth and Cey had more heroics. After consecutive singles to start the inning, Bobby Murcer looked to put down a sac bunt. The left handed hitter's bunt got up in the air on a soft line.

Cey charged in, dove out, caught it on the fly and immediately got to his feet to double off Milbourne. Rally done, Valenzuela completed the game with a 5-4 win, Los Angeles was back in it.

Saturday afternoon saw Rick Reuschel take the hill for the Yanks against Welch for the Dodgers. Game 4 would have a lot of twists and turns in which the starters would be long gone by the time it was settled.

Willie Randolph started the game by tripling off Welch and Milbourne promptly doubled him in. Dave Winfield drew a walk and Reggie Jackson singled to load the bases. With no room for error, Lasorda removed Welch and summoned Goltz. A sac fly from Watson added another run, but Goltz kept it at 2-0.

Randolph homered in the third, and the Yankees got two more in the fourth, with Rick Cerone drove in both Jackson and Watson. In the bottom of that same inning, Los Angeles started to come back from the 4-0 deficit.

Ken Landreaux started it with a leadoff double and came around a base hit by Lopes, who quickly stole second base. An infield hit and a productive ground ball scored Lopes, cutting the lead in half. An inning later the Dodgers got runners to second and third with one out. Reuschel was removed, and Rudy May, a steady starting pitcher during the regular season and the playoffs, came on and escaped with the 4-2 margin intact.

Cey delivered again in the fifth, following a one-out double by Garvey with an RBI base hit. But the Yankees quickly extended the lead in the sixth, with an error by Russell opening the door consecutive RBI singles from Oscar Gamble and Watson.

Trailing 6-3, Los Angeles pushed back again in the bottom of the sixth. Ron Davis, a hard-throwing right handed and the team's second-best reliever behind Gossage came on, but couldn't get it done. Davis walked Mike Scioscia and gave up a home run to Jay Johnstone.

Then the Yankee defense failed, as Jackson committed an error that put the speedy Lopes aboard. Lopes stole second *and* third, and tied the game when Russell singled. Davis was out, and Frazier was in.

Frazier couldn't stop the Dodger momentum though. LA picked right back up in the seventh, with an infield hit by Baker and a double by Monday. After Guerrero was intentionally walked, Yeager delivered a sac fly to give Los Angeles the lead for the first time.

Howe bunted the runners up, allowing Lopes' infield hit to score a key insurance run. It proved to matter when Jackson homered with two outs in the eighth, but Howe closed the door after that. A wild 8-7 win for the Dodgers had the Series tied.

After the crazy back-and-forth of Game 4, a steady pitchers' duel was the perfect foil and that's what the Guidry-Reuss rematch of Game 5 on late Sunday afternoon provided. The Yankees again scored first, with Jackson hitting a ground-rule double and coming around on a Lopes error and Piniella infield hit. But that was the end of scoring—or even serious threatening—until the seventh.

Guerrero and Yeager came up in the bottom of the seventh and delivered the decisive blows of the World Series—they homered back-to-back. It was Guidry's only weak spot all day, but it was enough. Reuss completed a five-hitter and Los Angeles improbably had the Series lead.

The first four innings of Game 6 made it look like the Yankees might provide some pushback with the Series back in the Bronx. Randolph hit a solo home run in the third off Hooton, and while the Dodgers got singles from Baker, Monday and Yeager to tie it in the fourth, this was still a 1-1 game with the veteran John on the mound for New York.

Then the Yankees broke. John was pinch-hit for in the bottom of the inning with runners on first and second and two outs. It's a legitimate scoring opportunity and Murcer, a good hitter, was the one who came off the bench. He hit the ball well, though it ended up a fly ball out to deep right. But that's just way too early to pull a veteran starting pitcher in a big game. And the roof caved in immediately.

Lopes started the top of the fifth by singling off Frazier. Lopes was bunted up and scored on a two-out single from Cey. Baker extended the inning with a single and Guerrero delivered the big blow with a triple that put LA up 4-1.

Davis came out of the Yankee bullpen in the sixth and issued a pair of walks, including one to Hooton. Russell drove in a run with a single, and now Reuschel came out of the Yankee pen to try and stop the bleeding. A double steal, a walk and an RBI grounder made it 6-1. Nettles, back in the lineup with his broken thumb, committed a two-out error to reload the bases. Guerrero delivered again, with a two-run single to make it 8-1.

The Yankees got a run in the sixth, and Guerrero finished his magical night with a home run in the eighth. The final was 9-2. Howe worked the final 3.2 IP to close it out and when Watson flew to Landreaux, the Dodgers were World Series champs.

It was the first title for the proud Dodger franchise since 1965, meaning it was the first since the expansion of 1969 created playoff rounds prior to the World Series.

And it was a championship driven by comebacks—Los Angeles became the first team to win best-of-five series after losing the first two in the Division Series. They won two straight road games in elimination spots to win the NLCS. They had won the World Series after losing the first two. And they had returned the favor to the Yankees, who three years earlier became the first team to drop Games 1 & 2 and then win four straight.

Three players shared 1981 World Series MVP honors, Cey, Guerrero and Yeager. Guerrero had the magic Game 6 and hit .333 for the Series. Yeager batted .286 and had two home runs, one of which came in the critical sequence of Game 5. These players had obviously helped. But this award should have gone to Cey alone.

Ron Cey hit .350 for the World Series, and he hit a three-run shot in Game 3 which came when Los Angeles desperately needed momentum, having lost the first two and about to squander an early opportunity in the third game. Cey then sealed the win with a defensive gem, and as the .350 average suggests, he contributed consistently throughout.

The Dodgers and Yankees have not met in a World Series since 1981. It was a needed dose of cathartic revenge for LA fans and Tommy Lasorda was finally a champion.

1982

Pitching defined the Dodgers and they were anchored by three starters who combined to start 110 games. Fernando Valenzuela followed up his 1981 Cy Young season with an '82 performance that included 19 wins, a 2.87 ERA and 285 innings pitched. Bob Welch was a 16-game winner with a 3.36 ERA. And Jerry Reuss, the veteran lefty, won 18 games and posted an ERA of 3.11.

The bullpen was deep and balanced. Steve Howe was the closer, though in an age that saw a lot of complete games that only added up to 13 saves. Even so, Howe logged nearly 100 innings and finished with 2.08 ERA. Dave Stewart was building his career with a mix of relief work and spot starting. Stewart went 9-8 with a 3.81 ERA in 146 innings.

Terry Forster provided veteran help with a 3.04 ERA and 22-year-old Tom Niedenfuer, who would eventually become the closer, worked 69 innings with a 2.71 ERA.

The staff's only problem was a lack of rotation depth and the decline of 32-year-old Burt Hooton was the most obvious symptom. Hooton only made 21 starts and went 4-7 with a 4.03 ERA.

Los Angeles could also hit, ranking fourth in the National League in runs scored. They were second in the league in home runs. The best player was right fielder Pedro Guerrero, who finished with a stat line of .378 on-base percentage/.536 slugging percentage, along with 32 home runs and 100 RBI. Dusty Baker, on the opposite side of the outfield wasn't far behind at .361/.458 with 23 home runs and 88 RBI.

Third baseman Ron Cey, the 34-year-old mainstay, hit 24 home runs and drove in 79 runs. Rick Monday came off the bench and in 254 at-bats posted a .372/.481 stat line.

Other key contributors included 33-year-old shortstop Bill Russell, who put up a .357 on-base percentage, and young center fielder Ken Landreaux and his .341 OBP. And even though first baseman Steve Garvey, long one of the bulwarks of the attack, showed clear signs of decline with a pedestrian .301/.418 stat line, he still drove in 86 runs.

The Dodgers had been characterized by tremendous continuity under Lasorda, but 1982 also saw the first changes into the previously stable lineup. Veteran catcher Steve Yeager was displaced by 22-year-old Mike Scioscia. And the infield was broken up. Davey Lopes was traded to Oakland in the offseason to pave the way for rookie Steve Sax.

Both moves proved to be the right ones. Scioscia didn't hit much in 1982 but he began the process of growing into one of the best game managers in baseball behind the plate and turned into a mainstay himself. And Sax began a solid career with a 1982 marked by 49 stolen bases and NL Rookie of the Year honors.

Los Angeles started slowly, losing four straight in San Diego and beginning 6-8. That, in of itself, wasn't too much of a problem but the Atlanta Braves got off to a blazing start. The Dodgers were in a quick 7 ½ game hole.

Streakiness would define this team though. They won four straight in Montreal and followed it up with a sweep of Philadelphia, another contender. By Memorial Day, Los Angeles had stabilized with a record of 24-24. They were in third place. Atlanta had cooled down, so the deficit was only four games, with San Diego nestled in between.

In early June, the streaks turned on the Dodgers. They hosted the Braves for a three-game series and lost all three. Los Angeles fell as far as 8 ½ games out. Then they turned it back around, winning 10 of 13 in a road trip against division foes, including a series win over Atlanta. At the All-Star break, the Dodgers were 46-42, still in third place, though the deficit was now seven games.

A middling performance out of the break, losing seven of thirteen and falling ten games back, seemed to indicate that this was not going to be LA's year. Then, in a year of streaks, the most stunning one dramatically changed the face of the NL West race.

The Dodgers went to Atlanta for four games. Los Angeles started by sweeping a doubleheader, scoring 18 runs in the process. Valenzuela threw a complete-game shutout in the third game. Baker homered twice in the finale, keying a 9-4 win and completing the series sweep.

Nor was Los Angeles done streaking. Atlanta came west for a four-game series starting on August 5. The Dodgers trailed the opener 2-1 in the ninth, were able to tie the game on an error and won it in the 10th on a Cey sac fly. On August 6, they trailed 4-3 in the ninth and used two errors and a walk to score twice and win again.

In the third game, it was the Dodgers' turn to blow a lead, giving up a 6-4 lead in the ninth. But they still won it in the 11th when Baker singled, stole second and scored on a base hit by outfielder Mike Marshall. Welch was brilliant in the finale, throwing eight shutout innings and Niedenfuer slammed the door on a 2-0 win.

The Dodgers had beaten the Braves eight straight times. The NL West margin had suddenly shrunk to a game and a half. Atlanta kept reeling, Los Angeles kept surging and the Dodgers were plus-four games by August 18.

Los Angeles was the veteran team with the decorated postseason pedigree. Atlanta was the young up-and-comer. This is where the standard script would tell us the Dodgers just took over the race and rolled on home. But the 1982 NL West race was anything but standard.

Atlanta's streakiness in 1982 made Los Angeles look like a model of consistency. And when the Dodgers cooled off just a bit and went through a 7-8 stretch, the Braves stormed back. On Labor Day, Los Angeles was 75-62 and again 1 ½ games out. San Diego was in third at 5 ½ games out while San Francisco was off the radar in fourth place.

The Padres began to fade in September, thanks in no small part to the Dodgers sweeping their SoCal rival. In the two weeks after Labor Day, the Dodgers went 10-3, took over first place and built up a 2 ½ game lead. It looked like a two-team race with the defending champs again in command.

Are you ready for another plot twist? The Giants suddenly came barreling down the stretch. In this same post-Labor Day period they had chipped to within five games and passed San Diego. And on the week of September 20-26, the Dodgers lost two to the Padres and then suffered a weekend series sweep at the hands of the Giants—in Los Angeles, no less.

The Braves didn't take advantage, so the result was a three-team race going into the final week. Los Angeles was 85-70, up one game on both Atlanta and San Francisco.

And the Dodgers kept losing. They dropped two straight at home to the woeful Reds. The Braves slipped into first place on the strength of beating the Giants two straight.

Los Angeles and Atlanta went head-to-head for two games in Dodger Stadium on Wednesday and Thursday. LA wasted a good outing from Valenzuela and lost 4-3 in twelve innings when Forster gave up two runs. They recovered and kept their season alive by winning 10-3 on Thursday. Garvey delivered three hits and Baker hit a back-breaking double that helped the break the game open in a five-run seventh inning.

Going into the final weekend, it was Atlanta by a game with Los Angeles and San Francisco tied for second. And it would be a showdown finale—the Dodgers and Giants were head-to-head in San Francisco, while the Braves had to travel to face a Padres team that might have faded, but was still dangerous.

Reuss took the ball for the Friday opener. He was brilliant and he had to be, because it was a scoreless tie in the eighth inning. Monday showed his penchant for the clutch home run hadn't been left behind in Montreal the previous October, when hit a grand slam. The Dodgers won 4-0, but the Braves answered with a win by the same score in San Diego.

The LA offense unloaded on Saturday and eliminated San Francisco. Sax and Russell got three hits apiece, with Landreaux, Cey and Scioscia all homering. The final was 15-2. But still no help from San Diego, where Atlanta won 4-2.

Sunday was high tension. The finale in San Francisco was tied 2-2 in the seventh inning. In San Diego, the Padres had jumped the Braves for five runs in the fifth and led 5-1, so the door was open for LA to set up a Monday afternoon playoff game for the NL West title.

But the long and storied Dodgers-Giants rivalry that includes tales from both coasts, got another installment here. Joe Morgan, who had long tormented Los Angeles as a member of Cincinnati's Big Red Machine, did it again as a member of the Giants. He hit a three-run blast in the bottom of the seventh off Forster. The game ended 5-3. Atlanta's loss went to waste. Los Angeles' bid for another postseason trip was finished.

1983

The 1983 Los Angeles Dodgers were just one more off the assembly line of contending teams that manager Tom Lasorda rolled out in this era.

Pitching drove the success of the '83 team with a staff ERA that was the best in the National League. Valenzuela, Reuss and Welch combined to make 97 starts. Valenzuela, two years removed from a Cy Young Award, won 15 games in a workhorse-like 35 starts, although the ERA was a bit high at 3.75. Welch won 15 more with an ERA of 2.65. And though the veteran Reuss only went 12-11, his ERA was a solid 2.94 and he went to the post 31 times.

Lasorda filled out the rotation with good work from Alejandro Pena, who was 12-9 with a 2.75 ERA. Even though Hooton was in decline at age 33, he still made 27 starts and went 9-8. And the bullpen was outstanding. Howe saved 18 games with a dazzling ERA of 1.44. Niedenfuer saved 11 more with an ERA of a buck-90.

The combination of the lefty Howe and the righty Niedenfuer enabled Lasorda to attack from both sides in the late innings. The manager also had Stewart, who worked 76 innings in relief with a 2.96 ERA. Joe Beckwith and Pat Zachry were similarly reliable.

Los Angeles needed pitching excellence, because its offense was mediocre. The lineup was in transition, as the veterans who were part of so much success continued to be shipped off. Garvey went to San Diego via free agency with no resistance from the Dodgers. Cey was traded to the Cubs.

An infield of Garvey and Cey at the corners, with Lopes and Russell up the middle, had defined this franchise for years. Now Russell was the only one left and at age 33 he was a mediocre offensive player at best. Other holdovers included Yeager and Baker, both 34-years-old and neither all that productive.

Los Angeles did have a rising star in the 27-year-old Guerrero. He finished with an on-base percentage of .373 and a slugging percentage of .531. Guerrero hit 32 home runs and finished with 103 RBI as he basically carried the offense. He finished fourth in the MVP voting, with the ultimate winner being Atlanta's Dale Murphy and future Hall of Famers Andre Dawson (Montreal) and Mike Schmidt (Philadelphia) having excellent years. But a good argument existed for any of the four to be at the top of the ballot.

Guerrero got help from Sax, who finished with a respectable OBP of .342 and stole 50 bases. Greg Brock was Garvey's highly touted replacement at first base. Brock only hit .224, but made up for some of that with a great batting eye that led to a .343 OBP. He also hit 20 home runs. Landreaux could drive the ball in the deep alleys of Dodger Stadium and posted a .451 slugging percentage.

The Dodgers came blazing out of the gate, starting 20-7 and taking five of six games from defending World Series champion St. Louis. The only problem was that the division rival Braves were almost as hot. Los Angeles and Atlanta were the two best teams in baseball by Memorial Day, with the Dodgers a game and a half up.

Los Angeles struck first in the head-to-head battles with Atlanta that began in June, taking four of six games. The NL West lead reached 5 ½ games on June 19. But from that day until the Fourth of July, which also ended the first half, the Dodgers went 4-10 against the Padres and

Astros. San Diego was an improved team, but Houston wasn't very good, so this was a missed opportunity and the consequence was Los Angeles trailing Atlanta by a game at the break. Both were still the two best teams in MLB.

The post-All-Star break period didn't get any better as Los Angeles went 10-15 and fell 6 ½ back. The low point came on August 13, a Saturday in Atlanta. They took a 7-6 lead on a Brock home run in the top of the ninth. Howe gave up a two-run blast in the bottom of the ninth. But they won the series finale on Sunday and after that started a 14-3 stretch that coincided with the Braves suddenly falling on hard times. By Labor Day, LA was 79-57 and 2 ½ games up.

The teams were no longer the top two in baseball, but the Dodgers had the pole position for the NL West stretch drive. And that stretch drive started in earnest on September 9 with a three-game series in Dodger Stadium and the lead now sitting on a clean three games.

Pena was brilliant in the opener, throwing seven shutout innings in a 3-2 win. The Dodgers seemed ready to carry the momentum into the next day when they grabbed an early 3-zip lead. But Valenzuela couldn't hold the lead and Los Angeles came apart in extra innings when a Russell error opened the floodgates in a 6-3 loss.

Rick Honeycutt, a lefthander who could both start and relieve, had been acquired in an August deal for Dave Stewart. It was a trade that was a disaster in the long-term as Stewart became one of the best—and most clutch—starting pitchers in the game. And it didn't work out that well in the short-term as Honeycutt's start in the series finale illustrates. He was hit hard and Los Angeles trailed 6-3. But the bullpen, led by three shutout innings from Beckwith stopped the bleeding. It set the stage for a dramatic ninth inning.

The Dodgers got three hits and drew three walks. The game was tied 6-6, with runners on second and third and one out. Role player R.J. Reynolds dropped down a bunt and Guerrero came in with the winning run. Los Angeles was four games up.

Even though the Dodgers lost three straight in San Francisco, they were able to win three of five games from Houston and the lead held steady at four when Los Angeles traveled to Atlanta for another head-to-head weekend series starting September 23.

Just winning one game would keep Los Angeles in firm control of the race and they took the pressure off right away on Friday night. Landreaux and Baker each homered and combined to drive in seven runs. Sax added three hits in an 11-2 rout. Even though LA dropped the final two games, scoring just three combined runs, they still led by three games with a week to play and no more head-to-head battles on the horizon.

After a first half where the Dodgers and Braves had set the bar for the rest of baseball, they sort of crawled to the finish line. Even though Los Angeles split four games from Monday through Thursday the lead held at three games and guaranteed them at least a one-game playoff. They finished the job on Friday night in a 4-3 win over San Francisco—and even that wasn't necessary. About a half-hour before the game ended, the word came that Atlanta had lost in

San Diego and Dodger Stadium erupted. No one had to watch a September call-up named Orel Hershiser throw two important shutout innings in the win.

Los Angeles was back in the postseason. And so were their old sparring partners from Philadelphia.

1983 NLCS

This series would begin with a pair of games in Los Angeles on Tuesday and Wednesday, and then go to Philadelphia for the duration over the weekend.

Two veteran left handers took the mound in the opener. Steve Carlton was one of the game's all-time greats, a lefty with a nasty slider who would win more than 300 games and make the Hall of Fame. He was on the mound for Philadelphia. Reuss didn't have anything close to Carlton's resume, but Reuss was a very steady pitcher in his own right.

Philadelphia jumped on top quick when Mike Schmidt hit a two-out home run in the first inning. The two pitchers then settled into a great duel. Philly put runners on first and second with none out in the fourth, but couldn't score. In the sixth, the Dodgers got Sax to third base with one out. But Carlton got Baker to pop up and escaped.

In the bottom of the eighth, the score still 1-0, Los Angeles loaded the bases with two outs. Philadelphia closer Al Holland was summoned and induced a fly ball to right from Mike Marshall. Holland closed out the ninth without incident and the Phillies, with three home games still in the bank, were in control of the series.

Another big-time pitching matchup was set for Game 2. Valenzuela had won the Cy Young Award as a rookie two years earlier and won 15 games in 1983. The Phillies had the soon-to-be named Cy Young winner for 1983 to come back with, in John Denny.

With two outs in the bottom of the first, the Dodgers finally got on the board, with help from the Philly defense. Shortstop Ivan DeJesus booted a play that should have ended the inning. A hit batsman set up Landreaux's RBI single. The Phils didn't wait long to answer—Gary Matthews hit a leadoff home run to start the second.

Lasorda got aggressive in the bottom of the fourth and it blew up. With runners on first and third with one out, a double steal didn't work, as Marshall was nailed at third. But what the Dodgers couldn't create for themselves, the Phillies again gave them in the fifth inning.

Gary Maddox, one of the great defensive center fielders of his era, muffed a fly ball off the bat of Valenzuela to start the inning. Ironically, it wasn't the first time Maddox had made a big error in Dodger Stadium in October—the 1978 NLCS had ended when he let a single skip through his legs and the winning run came around.

This error resulted in Valenzuela getting all the way to third. When he was thrown out at the plate on a one-out ground ball, it looked like Denny might escape. But with two outs, Baker drew a walk and then Guerrero lashed a two-run triple to make it 3-1.

Valenzuela was locked in and he got an insurance run in the eighth when Russell drew a walk, stole second and scored on a base hit. In the top of the ninth, the Phillies finally showed signs of offensive life. Matthews singled and Greg Gross drew a walk to start the inning. Valenzuela was removed for Tom Niedenfuer, who blew right through the 7-8-9 spots in the order with a couple strikeouts. The series was tied.

After a day off for travel, Philadelphia sent out Charles Hudson to pitch in front of the home fans, while Los Angeles answered with Welch. Lasorda had little patience for Welch though, and after consecutive one-out walks in the second, the manager went to Pena. A passed ball, another walk and a productive out from catcher Bo Diaz still resulted in the Phils grabbing a couple runs without the benefit of a hit.

Philadelphia had two old members of the great Big Red Machine in Joe Morgan and Pete Rose. They each singled and a sac fly from Joe Lefebvre made it a 3-0 game after three innings.

Los Angeles struck back in the top of the fourth when Baker singled and Marshall homered. But Matthews again had an immediate answer—a home run to start the bottom half of the inning and it was 4-2. That was it for Pena and Lasorda turned to Honeycutt.

The pitching change didn't work. Rose again got a rally going with a one-out single in the fifth. Schmidt doubled to put runners on second and third. Lasorda summoned Joe Beckwith, who struck out Sixto Lezcano. But Matthews was next, and he singled to right to score both runs and then stole second for good measure.

He didn't make it around, but it was 6-2 and Matthews had one more RBI single coming, this one in the seventh. Hudson went the distance and with the 7-2 win, the Phillies had two chances to close out a pennant on their home field.

Saturday saw Carlton and Reuss back on the mound. It didn't take long for Philadelphia to amp up the pressure on LA and once again it was Matthews doing the damage. In the bottom of the first, Schmidt and Lezcano hit consecutive two-out singles. Matthews unloaded with a three-run blast and it was quickly 3-0.

After rolling through three innings, Carlton finally showed a crack in his armor. Baker led off the fourth with a home run. Mike Marshall followed with a double. But Carlton picked him off second, then struck out Landreaux and Derrell Thomas to keep it 3-1. And the Phils struck back in the fifth when Rose singled and scored on a double by Schmidt. After Schmidt was bunted to third, Lasorda ordered Matthews intentionally walked, but Maddox still picked up the run with an RBI ground ball.

With a 5-1 lead, Carlton was in firm control, but to remove any doubt, Lezcano followed a Schmidt single with a two-run blast in the sixth inning. The Dodgers got a run in the eighth and

Holland came on for Carlton, who had been masterful in what would prove to be his final year in the postseason. The closer got the last five outs, striking out Russell to clinch the pennant.

Matthews and Carlton were both worthy choices for NLCS MVP. Matthews went 6-for-14, homered three times and drove in eight runs. Furthermore, those hits all came at key times, often answering Dodger successes, making their ultimate impact seem even greater. Carlton got two of his team's three wins, pitching 13 2/3 innings and giving up one run. Matthews was the one chosen as series MVP.

1985

The Los Angeles Dodgers took a serious step back in 1984. After the first seven years under Tom Lasorda had produced four NL West titles, three National League pennants and the 1981 World Series title, the Dodgers finished under .500 in 1984. They looked ready to fall behind other powers that seemed to be rising in the NL West. Instead, the 1985 Los Angeles Dodgers completely reversed course, had a comeback year and won Lasorda's fifth division title.

Pitching was the Dodger staple and 24-year-old Fernando Valenzuela, already in his fifth year in the majors, won 17 games with a 2.45 ERA. Another young arm splashed upon the scene, one with the name of Orel Hershiser. The young righthander went a dazzling 19-3, finished with a 2.03 ERA and ended up third in the NL Cy Young voting. Lasorda got work from Jerry Reuss and Bob Welch, each of whom won 14 games.

The pitching staff finished with the best ERA in the National League, and a deep bullpen played a key role. Tom Niedenfuer, the 25-year-old closer, saved 19 games with a 2.71 ERA. Ken Howell kicked in 12 saves with a 3.77 ERA and Carlos Diaz was at 2.61.



Offensively, the Dodgers were carried by left fielder Pedro Guerrero, who finished with an on-base percentage of .422, hit 33 home runs and drove in 87 runs. Mike Scioscia, then a 26-year-old catcher, also had an OBP over .400, keyed by phenomenal plate discipline resulting in 77 walks.

More power on the corners came from first baseman Greg Brock and right fielder Mike Marshall, as they combined to hit 49 home runs. Steve Sax was a big table-setter, with his .352 on-base percentage. It added up to a lineup that ranked fifth in the National League in runs scored.

The Dodgers were slow out of the gate and were 21-22 on Memorial Day, in fourth place and 5 ½ games back of the San Diego Padres. The Padres had won the NL pennant in 1984 and with a corps of young talent appeared to be the future of the NL West. If you thought the Dodgers were the past, the first couple months of the 1985 season wouldn't have done anything to dissuade you.

Perhaps the summer months would have changed some minds though. Because Los Angeles gradually started to gain steam going toward the All-Star break and a 12-4 stretch to end the first half pushed the Dodgers into first place.

The stretch included series wins over the Cincinnati Reds, also contending in the NL West, the St. Louis Cardinals, future champs of the NL East and the Chicago Cubs, the defending champs of the NL East.

Los Angeles started the second half the same way they finished the first. They took three of four from St. Louis out of the break, went 12-5 and suddenly they were six games up. At the end of August, the front office made a deal to help the offense, adding third baseman Bill Madlock. In his 34 games for the Dodgers, Madlock hit .360.

The best news was that the acquisition of Madlock would matter more for the playoffs than for the stretch drive though, because the Dodgers blew the NL West open. Their lead grew to as many nine games in mid-August and never became close the rest of the way.

Los Angeles had a problem with San Diego head-to-head—the Dodgers lost 8 of 10 to the Padres—but the teams went in opposite directions as soon as they stopped playing each other. In fact, it was the Reds who ended up in second and the Padres fell hard to a third-place tie with the Houston Astros.

In a year where three of the four divisions went to the final Saturday of the regular season, Los Angeles was the anomaly. They clinched on the final Wednesday, a 9-3 home win over Atlanta. Marshall had three hits, a home run and three RBI, Hershiser got the win and the party could start in Hollywood.

1985 NLCS

MLB expanded the LCS format to a best-of-seven in 1985, after going best-of-five in this round since its inception in 1969. The Dodgers held home field advantage in the 2-3-2 format by virtue of the rotation system.

A great pitching matchup between John Tudor for St. Louis and Valenzuela for Los Angeles opened the series and the game was scoreless into the fourth. Madlock reached on an error in the fourth, stole second and scored on a single by Guerrero. In the sixth, the Dodgers opened up some breathing room, again with Madlock in the middle of it.

The veteran third baseman doubled with one out. After Guerrero was intentionally walked, Scioscia hit a two-out RBI single that moved Guerrero to third. A bunt single scored another run, and a double by Sax brought Scioscia around for a commanding 4-0 lead.

St. Louis rallied in the seventh, with singles from Terry Pendleton, Ozzie Smith and Tito Landrum to bring one run with only one out and the tying run at the plate. The Dodgers brought in Niedenfuer, who promptly got a double play ball. Inning over, and for all practical purposes, game over. Los Angeles won 4-1.

The following night the Dodgers had Hershiser, in his first October appearance, facing Joaquin Andujar, who had been a key hero of the 1982 World Series title for the Cardinals.

Hershiser looked vulnerable early, allowing speedy Vince Coleman and Willie McGee to each base in the first inning. Scioscia bailed his pitcher out by gunning both runners trying to steal.

The Cards were able to pick up a run in the third, with McGee singled, moving up to second after a walk and then coming all the way around on a wild pitch. But it didn't long for the Dodgers to have an answer in their own half of the third.

Sax singled with one out and a bad pickoff throw sent him all the way to third. Hershiser helped his own cause with a game-tying single. With two outs, Landreaux ripped a double that scored a run and then he came around on a base hit by Madlock. The Dodgers got two more in the fourth when Scioscia bunted his way on and Brock homered. In the fifth, a Landreaux double and RBI single from Marshall made the score 6-1 and it was all but over.

Madlock and Guerrero drove in add-on runs, and the Cards added a meaningless run in the ninth, as Hershiser closed out the complete-game 8-2 rout. The series went to the Midwest for the weekend with Los Angeles in firm command.

On Saturday afternoon, St. Louis turned to 18-game winner Danny Cox against Welch. The Dodgers had a chance to quickly put pressure on the Cardinals when Landreaux doubled in the first and there were runners on second and third with no one out. Then Cox got Madlock, got a break when Marshall's line drive found the glove of Ozzie Smith and the Dodgers failed to score. It's not unreasonable to look back and say that this missed chance was the big turning point of the 1985 NLCS.

In the bottom of the first, Coleman singled and quickly stole second. McGee drew a walk, and a bad pickoff throw cost two bases, as Coleman scored and McGee took third. After there was one out, Pendleton's productive ground ball out made it 2-0.

St. Louis' speed forced more mistakes in the second inning. Coleman singled, and when Scioscia tried to pick him off, the ball skipped away and Coleman took third. McGee singled him home. Even though McGee was caught stealing, Tom Herr followed with a home run and a 4-0 lead.

Los Angeles' bullpen quieted St. Louis down, and the Dodgers got a run in the fourth on consecutive doubles from Guerrero and Marshall, but Marshall died on third with less than two outs.

In the seventh, Sax singled, moved up on a groundout and scored on a two-out hit from Landreaux. Cox departed, having done his job and a bullpen-by-committee of Ricky Horton, Todd Worrell and Ken Dayley closed out the 4-2 win.

On Sunday night, everyone tuned in to Game 4 to find out that the biggest news happened in the pregame warmups. In a bizarre incident, a runaway tarp had run over the leg of Coleman

while he was stretching. The Rookie of the Year, who had stolen 110 bases at the top of the lineup, was gone for the duration of the postseason.

It certainly didn't matter much in this game. Reuss was on the mound and had nothing. In the second inning, the Cardinals hit seven singles, drew two walks, and along with one error, they scored nine times. Landrum had the biggest night, with four hits and 3 RBIs, while Jack Clark and Pendleton drove in three apiece. Tudor pitched on three days' rest and coasted to a 12-2 win.

Monday afternoon brought the pivotal Game 5 and this series' most memorable moments were ahead. Valenzuela was on the hill for LA, while St. Louis hoped 36-year-old Bob Forsch could match up.

The Cards got on the board quickly, with McGee and Ozzie Smith drawing walks, and then scoring on a Herr double. Another bad pickoff throw put Herr on third, but Clark lined out, and Valenzuela struck out Cesar Cedeño, enabling the Dodger lefty to escape with the score 2-0. Valenzuela escaped again, when Pendleton doubled and got to third with one out. Fernando struck out McGee to key the escape.

Those missed chances loomed large, as Valenzuela settled down and worked eight innings, not allowing another run. Los Angeles tied it up in the fourth when Landreaux's single was followed by a Madlock home run. The game was tied 2-2 when the ninth inning arrived.

Niedenfuer was on the mound for the Dodgers when Ozzie Smith came to the plate. The shortstop was not known for his offense and certainly not his power. This afternoon, he launched a shot toward right field. It cleared the fence. The Cardinals won 3-2 and radio announcer Jack Buck shouted "Go crazy folks! Go crazy!" It's that line that continues to live on in baseball montages today.

Los Angeles still had two games at home and Hershiser on the mound for Game 6, in a rematch with Andujar. The Dodgers grabbed the early lead. Mariano Duncan led off the home half of the first with a double and scored on another big hit by Madlock. In the second, after Brock drew a walk, both Hershiser and Duncan singled and it was 2-0.

Andujar got himself back in the game when he doubled in the top of the third and then scored on Herr's two-out single. But Madlock kept haunting the Cardinals. After Los Angeles got a manufactured run on an error, stolen base and two productive outs, Madlock gave a run the easy way—he homered and it was 4-1.

St. Louis finally cracked Hershiser in the seventh. Darrell Porter and Landrum singled, then moved up on a groundball and scored on a single by McGee. Ozzie Smith lashed a triple and the game was tied 4-4. Niedenfuer came on and kept the game tied by striking out Clark and Andy Van Slyke.

Los Angeles looked ready to take the lead right back in their own half of the seventh when Duncan hit a leadoff triple. Worrell, a young reliever with a good fastball got Landreaux to pop

out and after an intentional walk, Worrell solved the riddle of Madlock—he got him to hit into an inning-ending double play. But when Marshall homered to start the bottom of the eighth, it looked like we were still heading for a Game 7.

Niedenfuer was still on the mound for the ninth. With one out, McGee singled and stole second. Ozzie drew a walk. Herr grounded out, both runners moving up. With two outs and an open base, it was assumed that Los Angeles manager Tom Lasorda would intentionally walk Clark, the only home run threat in the St. Louis lineup.

Clark also had a deserved reputation for clutch hitting. But on the flip side, it was only a one-run game, and Van Slyke was a productive hitter himself—one who had good plate discipline in a spot where a walk would also tie it. I understand the argument both ways, and if it were up to me, I'd have pitched to Clark—who had struck out his previous at-bat against Niedenfuer.

It's debatable what was crushed harder—Lasorda for his decision to pitch to Clark, or the ball that Clark hit. A no-doubt-about-it blast to left field gave St. Louis a 7-5 lead. The crowd was stunned, and Dayley closed the bottom of the ninth in order. The Cardinals had completed the turnaround to win the pennant.

A surprise turnaround season had a crushing ending and it led to two seasons in the wilderness.

1988

The slippage of 1986-87 hit rock bottom with a 73-89 record in '87. The 1988 Los Angeles Dodgers made a complete turnaround, with their ultimate World Series title keyed by a moment that has lived on in baseball history.

It was not an imposing lineup that Tom Lasorda had at his disposal. The Dodgers finished sixth in the National League in runs scored, and it's hard to figure how they even got that high, ranking below the league average in every category of significance. Los Angeles made up for it with pitching.



Orel Hershiser was the ace of the staff and won 23 games with a 2.26 ERA. Hershiser won the Cy Young Award with a dominating stretch of 58 scoreless innings in September, a major league record. He was backed up by Tim Lary, a 17-game winner with a 2.91 ERA and rookie Tim Belcher won twelve games and finished with a 2.91 ERA.

Lasorda pieced together the rest of the rotation with a mix of veterans, ranging from Fernando Valenzuela, to 43-year-old Don Sutton to John Tudor, along with 23-year-old Shawn

Hillegas

The bullpen was anchored by Jay Howell, acquired in a three-team deal with the Oakland Athletics and New York Mets. The Dodgers got another reliever in Jesse Orosco. The cost was

high—Bob Welch, who had a strong year in Oakland and it probably wasn't worth the price. But that doesn't mean Howell and Orosco didn't pitch well, with ERAs of 2.08 and 2.72 respectively.

Furthermore, Alejandro Pena and Brian Holton were superb, with sub-2.00 ERAs, and Tim Crews was effective, at 3.14. There were a lot of tools at Lasorda's disposal to keep games close, and if his team got a lead the Dodgers were tough to come back on.

The task of getting leads started with right fielder Kirk Gibson. The Dodgers signed the one-time World Series hero of the Detroit Tigers in free agency, and Gibson finished with an on-base percentage of .377 and slugging percentage of .483. He was also credited with bringing toughness and leadership to the clubhouse, so much so that the reputation got him the NL MVP award.

That, frankly, was pushing the leadership point a little too far, but there's no denying the key role Gibson played in the LA offense. Because the rest of the lineup had no one who stood out. Mike Scioscia at catcher and second baseman Steve Sax had good careers, but were not good at the plate in 1988. Mike Marshall gave modest power in right field, but that's about it.

Alfredo Griffin, another piece in the three-team trade with the A's and Mets, hit .199 at shortstop. Jeff Hamilton at third base, John Shelby in center and Franklin Stubbs at first base were all offensive disasters. Somehow, Lasorda made it all work well enough to give the pitching staff what they needed.

Los Angeles came out of the gate quickly. They started 11-4 including taking three of four from the San Francisco Giants, who had taken the NL West in 1987. The Dodgers maintained a persistent lead throughout the spring and at the Memorial Day turn, they were up 1 ½ games on the Houston Astros—who had won the NL West in 1986—five up on San Francisco and 5 ½ up on the Cincinnati Reds.

The Dodgers took five of six games from the Reds and Astros and stretched the lead to as much as 5 ½ before being swept by the Pittsburgh Pirates just prior to the All-Star break. The Dodgers went into the break up 2 ½ on the Giants, 5 ½ on the Astros and 7 ½ on the Reds.

It was expected the race would stay tight. The Dodgers, after all, had the unimpressive lineup and the 89-loss season the year before. They were being chased by the division's two most recent champions, and the Reds were generally considered to have the most young talent of any of the West's contenders. But it was after the All-Star break that Los Angeles made its big move.

The Dodgers went to Wrigley Field and beat the Chicago Cubs five straight times, and their lead would eventually stretch as high as eight games. Then came a scare, as a 13-game stretch with Houston and Cincinnati produced a 3-10 record and saw the lead whittled down to a game and a half. But Los Angeles promptly counterpunched, winning nine of ten and pushing the lead right back to 5 ½. This sequence included taking three of four from San Francisco, who faded hard.

Los Angeles kept its challengers at arm's length. From September 7-11, they hosted the Astros and Reds and went 3-2. From September 16-20, the Dodgers made return visits and went 4-1. The Los Angeles margin never got smaller than four games and then pulled away one more time down the stretch to a 94-win season and a seven-game margin in a division where five of the six teams finished with winning records.

The Dodgers had enjoyed a nice comeback season. With a couple of powerful 100-plus win teams, the New York Mets and the Oakland A's, also in the postseason, it seemed like Los Angeles' time had run out. But it was just getting started.

1988 NLCS

Hershiser was naturally LA's Game 1 starter against the Mets' Dwight Gooden, the 23-year-old who already had the 1985 Cy Young Award under his belt. The best-of-seven series began in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles quickly manufactured a run in the first inning off Gooden, as Sax led off with a single, stole second and scored on a two-out base hit to right field by Mike Marshall. The Mets' ace quickly settled down though and the anticipated pitchers' duel emerged.

It was still 1-0 in the seventh when LA manufactured another run. Scioscia doubled to start the bottom of the inning, moved up on a ground ball out and scored on a base hit by Griffin.

Hershiser kept the shutout into the ninth inning. Greg Jeffries got a leadoff single, and scored on a double from Strawberry. With one out, Hershiser was removed for Howell. A walk to Kevin McReynolds put the tying run aboard. Howell struck out Howard Johnson and got to within one out of a win.

Gary Carter came to the plate. The 34-year-old catcher was well past his prime and no longer a productive offensive player. But he was still clutch and a double to centerfield cleared the bases. The Mets had a stunning 3-2 win and with their win over LA's ace on the road, seemed in complete control.

Lasorda had to turn to a rookie, Tim Belcher, to essentially save the season. David Cone, a young 22-game winner, was on the mound for the Mets. Once again, Marshall got a first inning RBI for Los Angeles, coming through with two outs after Mickey Hatcher had walked and moved to second on a balk.

In the second inning, Cone hit a batter, but had two outs and Belcher at the plate. At this most unlikely of moments, the game got completely away from the New York starter. Belcher, Sax and Hatcher all singled in succession. Gibson was intentionally walked, and Marshall singled. The score was suddenly 5-0.

New York made noise to get back in it in the fourth, when Jeffries drew a leadoff walk and Keith Hernandez homered. Los Angeles answered with a run in the fifth, and the game went to the

ninth at 6-2. The Mets made it interesting. Lenny Dykstra doubled, then Hernandez and Strawberry singled. With one out, it was 6-3 and the tying run was at the plate.

Pena got the chance to close the door. He got McReynolds to pop out and Carter again came to the plate. This time it was a fly ball out to right and the NLCS was tied.

A travel day and a rainout resulted in the Dodgers bringing back Hershiser on three days' rest for Game 3. Mets manager Davey Johnson, with a deeper rotation, stayed on schedule and went with Ron Darling. For the third straight game, the Dodgers got out to the early lead.

In the second inning, Marshall and John Shelby worked walks. Scioscia laid down a bunt, resulting in a Hernandez throwing error from his first base spot that resulted in a run and left runners on second and third with none out. Jeff Hamilton picked up one more run with an RBI groundout, but Darling struck out Griffin to keep the game at 2-0.

Sax created another run in the third with his speed, a leadoff single, a stolen base and he came around on a hit by Gibson. The Mets got the run back in the bottom of the inning on a break. Mookie Wilson had K'd for the second out, but the third strike was a wild pitch and Wilson got to first base. A single from Jeffries and double by Strawberry cut the lead to 3-1.

New York tied up the game in the sixth. A Strawberry single and error by Hamilton put a man in scoring position. With two outs, Carter and Wally Backman each delivered RBI singles and it was 3-3. Los Angeles took the lead back against Mets' reliever Roger McDowell on two infield hits and two walks.

In the bottom of the eighth, Howell came on for his second chance to close out a Hershiser win. Howell walked McReynolds to start the inning and Lasorda wasted no time going to Pena. This time it didn't matter. Backman doubled with two outs to tie the game 4-4.

Lasorda went to Jesse Orosco, who just two years earlier had closed the World Series for the Mets. That didn't matter either. Wilson drove in the lead run. Jeffries was hit by a pitch, Hernandez walked with the bases loaded. Strawberry blooped a single. It was 8-4 and that's where it ended.

Any scenario prior to the 1988 NLCS that had the Dodgers winning was surely dependent on Hershiser carrying the Dodgers. The ace was doing his job, but Los Angeles had now lost two of three games where he handed the bullpen a late lead.

New York was in command with Gooden on the mound, against 34-year-old John Tudor. Los Angeles quickly showed their resiliency though. Sax again got a first-inning rally going, with a single and stolen base. Hatcher walked, and both runners moved up on a ground ball out. With two outs, Shelby drove each in with a single.

The Mets got to Tudor in the fourth. After a single from Hernandez, Strawberry and McReynolds each homered for a 3-2 lead. In the sixth, McReynolds doubled and Carter tripled to start the inning. With the score 4-2 and the game threatening to get away, Lasorda called on Brian Holton

to keep his team alive. Holton got a strikeout, and after a walk, induced Gooden to hit into a double play.



It looked like Holton's work might not matter, as Gooden kept the 4-2 lead into the ninth inning. He was still on the mound when Shelby worked him for a walk. And then this unpredictable NLCS took another plot twist, as Scioscia stunned the crowd with a two-run blast that tied the game.

The game stretched into the wee hours of the morning. With two outs in the 12th inning, McDowell was on the mound and Gibson homered. But the Mets had one more rally left in them

Leary, normally a starter, was in the game for the Dodgers. Consecutive singles by Mickey Sasser and Lee Mazzilli got a rally going with one out, and Orosco came in. After a walk to Hernandez loaded the bases, Orosco got perhaps the out of the series when he induced Strawberry to pop up.

Orosco was a lefty and McReynolds, a good right handed power hitter, was now up. Lasorda went to the best righthander he could think of—Orel Hershiser. The ace came in and got a fly ball to centerfield to tie the series.

The teams had to be back in Los Angeles by Tuesday night, so Monday's Game 5 required each to come right back and play a noon start on Monday. The Mets appeared to still be flat. LA got three in the fourth, when Rick Dempsey hit a two-out double with two men on and Griffin followed with another double off lefty starter Sid Fernandez.

One inning later, after Sax and Hatcher singled, Gibson homered, Fernandez was out and the Mets were staring at a 6-0 hole. They quickly made a move against Belcher in the bottom of the fifth, when singles by Johnson and Backman were followed by a two-out home run from Dykstra to cut the lead in half.

The game stayed 6-3 into the eighth, when Dykstra doubled and scored on a single by Jeffries to make it 6-4. The bullpens were on fumes and Lasorda dug deep to find Ricky Horton. He was able to get Hernandez, but Strawberry singled to reach base as the tying run with one out. Holton was summoned.

It was time for one more plot twist. McReynolds bounced a would-be single to the left side. But it hit Jeffries, and the runner was out. Carter flied to left. The inning was over, LA added an insurance run in the ninth and closed out a 7-4 win.

By late afternoon on Monday, the Mets had—in about eighteen hours—gone from having their ace on the mound and being three outs from a 3-1 series lead, to trailing the series 3-2, going on the road and having the prospect of Hershiser in Game 7 staring them down.

New York, to their credit, didn't roll over. They went west and Game 6 saw them finally score the game's first run. An error by Hatcher started the game, and Backman singled. McReynolds hit a sac fly to stake Cone to a 1-0 lead.

Each team then missed chances. Gibson's failure to sacrifice bunt short-circuited a Dodger rally in the bottom of the inning and in then Backman struck out with a man on third and one out. The Mets were able to add a run in the third, when light-hitting shortstop Kevin Elster doubled in Strawberry.

New York was able to chase Leary in the fifth, after Strawberry drew a walk and McReynolds homered. Holton came in and did another yeoman's job at limiting damage, but Cone was sharp tonight and the four-run lead was going to stand up. LA got a run back in the fifth, but New York immediately countered with a run of their own in the top of the sixth and the Dodgers never got the tying run to the plate in a 5-1 final.

Los Angeles now turned to the ultimate insurance policy—the best pitcher in baseball on their homefield. Darling was on the mound for New York. If nothing else, the Mets knew if they kept it close, they could break LA's heart late in a Hershiser start.

This time New York couldn't keep it close though. In fact, they came apart at the seams. Sax singled and came around to score on a Hatcher double and Gibson sac fly in the first. In the second inning, Scioscia and Hamilton singled to start the frame. Griffin put down a sac bunt and beat it out.

Hershiser came to the plate and grounded to third...but Johnson booted the ball. Sax drove in two runs with a single. Backman booted a grounder. Five runs were in, the score was 6-0 after two innings and the rest of the night was one long party in Dodger Stadium. That's how the game ended, with a complete-game five-hitter for Hershiser.

Hershiser, with 24.2 IP in the series and a 1.09 ERA was named 1988 NLCS MVP. I can't argue with this, but I'll admit I did do some digging to see if another choice might have been more appropriate—after all, even though it wasn't the ace's fault, the fact the Dodgers lost his first two starts had to suggest someone else must have come through.

But while there were certainly heroes—Holton, Scioscia, Gibson and Sax—none had the series-long production to make an MVP choice defensible. So let's stick with the chalk and honor Orel's brilliance.

One of the 100-plus win behemoths. The big one, the mighty Oakland A's, were next.

1988 WORLD SERIES

The Dodgers entered the series with one big disadvantage—aside from already being seen as the decisively inferior team—Gibson was hurt and available for pinch-hit duty at most. The rotation system for scheduling fell for the National League this year, so the series opened in Dodger Stadium.

Belcher would pitch the opener against Oakland's 21-game winner, an old Dodger friend in Dave Stewart. The Dodgers staked Belcher to an early lead, when Sax was hit by a pitch and Hatcher homered in the first inning.

Belcher couldn't hold the lead though. Throughout their ALCS sweep of the Boston Red Sox, the A's had immediately responded to scoring by the opponent, and that pattern continued here. In the top of the second, Glenn Hubbard singled. Belcher walked Stewart, who hadn't batted all season.

Carney Lansford also worked a walk and it brought up Jose Canseco, the MVP of the American League, with two outs. Canseco unloaded a grand slam and it was 4-2.

Los Angeles chipped away for a run in the sixth, on consecutive singles by Mike Marshall, John Shelby and Mike Scioscia, but Stewart kept the lead at 4-3, and that's where it stood in the ninth inning when the A's ace turned the game over to Dennis Eckersley, baseball's best closer and the MVP of the ALCS.

Eckersley got two outs, when Mike Davis walked and then stole second. Gibson was summoned to pinch hit. The physical ailment in his lower body was obvious when he got to the plate. If he reached base as the winning run, he would without question need a pinch-runner.

It turned out not to be necessary. Eckersley threw a backdoor slider. Gibson was ready and he pulled a line drive into the right field stands. He hobbled around the bases, his arm thrust of celebration now an indispensable part of baseball highlight montages. So is the voice of national radio announcer Jack Buck, who exclaimed "I don't believe what I just saw...I don't believe what I just saw!"



The Dodgers not only had an improbable win and some momentum, they had Hershiser on the mound for Game 2. And the momentum rolled right into this game. With one out in the bottom of the second, Hershiser singled off Storm Davis. It was followed by singles from Sax, Franklin Stubbs and Mickey Hatcher. The score was 2-0, two men were aboard and then Mike Marshall blasted a home run.

A 5-0 lead for Hershiser in 1988 was piling on and he threw a complete-game three-hitter. The final was six-zip and the Dodgers were in command.

The Dodgers saw another old friend on the mound for Game 3 in Oakland in Bob Welch. Tudor was on the mound for Los Angeles, but he had to be removed in the second inning. Leary came on.

Oakland got a run in the third when Hubbard singled, stole second and scored when catcher Ron Hassey went the other way for an RBI single. Los Angeles tied it in the fifth, with a leadoff single from Hamilton, who moved up on a bunt and scored on a two-out hit from Stubbs.

LA missed a chance to take the lead in the sixth when they loaded the bases with none out. Greg Cadaret, part of a deep A's bullpen, came on with his team's hopes hanging in the balance. He got a pop out, a ground ball force play at home and pulled a Houdini-like escape to keep the game tied 1-1.

The A's made it pay off in the ninth, when Mark McGwire hit a line drive home run to left off Dodger closer Jay Howell and Oakland was back in the series.

With Stewart on the mound for Game 4 and available for a potential Game 7, there was every reason for Oakland fans to still feel like this World Series was theirs for the taking. But early mistakes hurt them. Sax had worked a leadoff walk and Hatcher singled. With one out, a passed ball, an error on Hubbard and productive ground ball out gave the Dodgers two quick runs.

Belcher was back on the mound, and Oakland again immediately responded against the rookie. Luis Polonia singled, took second on a passed ball and two ground ball outs brought the run around.

Los Angeles added a run when Oakland shortstop Walt Weiss committed an error off a line drive with a man on second and two outs. The A's then missed a big chance with two on and none out in the fourth, when Belcher struck out Dave Parker and retired McGwire.

The A's did add a run in the sixth on a two-out single by Dave Henderson, a walk to McGwire and a base hit from Lansford. But the Dodgers got it right back in the seventh, on a walk to Griffin, a base hit from Sax and a groundball out to bring the run in.

Oakland had nine outs left or they were going to be facing Hershiser on Thursday night with all margin for error gone. And they rallied. Weiss singled with one out and scored on Henderson's two-out double. Howell came on with a chance to redeem himself. He walked Canseco. Parker hit a line drive at Griffin, but once again a shortstop failed to snare the ball, and the bases were loaded.

McGwire was at the plate with a chance to be a hero again, or at least tie the game. But he popped out and the inning ended. Howell took over and nailed down the final six outs to close out a huge save. Everything was pointing the Dodgers' way with the 4-3 win.

The last thing Oakland wanted against Hershiser was to fall behind early, but that's what happened. Stubbs singled in the first inning and Hatcher homered. The A's got a run back in the third, but Mike Davis hit a two-run blast in the fourth. Dempsey drove in another Dodger run in the sixth with a double.

Hershiser kept the 5-1 lead into the eighth when Oakland made its last-gasp rally. Stan Javier hit a one-out RBI single, and Henderson worked a walk. The tying run was up in the person of Canseco. Hershiser got the MVP to pop out, and then struck out Parker. The game was all but over and the ace completed his four-hitter and the celebration was on in Hollywood.

The Series MVP award went to Hershiser, for his 18 innings of work and allowing only two earned runs to the most feared lineup in baseball. He was also 3-for-3 at the plate with an RBI. An honorable mention goes to Hatcher, who was 7-for-9 and had two big home runs. But the ultimate memory of the 1988 World Series goes to Gibson, who turned the tide with a scene that appropriately happened in Hollywood.