

MILWAUKEE SIX-PACK

The Brewer Glory Era Of 1978-83



I grew up in southeastern Wisconsin in the late 1970s and 1980s. The Milwaukee Brewers haven't had a lot of great moments in their relatively short history, coming to the city in 1970. But the six years from 1978-83 were great ones for baseball in Milwaukee.

The Brewers produced an potent offense that drew nationwide attention, with nicknames ranging from "Bambi's Bombers" (after manager George Bamberger) to "Harvey's Wallbangers" (after another manager in Harvey Kuenn). They produced MVPs and Cy Young award winners. Future Hall of Fame players populated their lineup. They made the playoffs twice, the World Series in 1982 and played some of the most epic games baseball has ever seen in the process.

In short, they were a lot of fun. And in the *Milwaukee Six-Pack* download, I've tried to convey some of that sense of fun, from the surprise breakout year of 1978 to the struggles to find pitching, to the monster trade with St. Louis prior to the 1981 season. To an October of 1982 that was filled with both thrills and heartbreak, to the fade of September 1983 that marked the end of an era.

TheSportsNotebook.com is chock full of articles on individual team seasons in all sports. There is an article up for each one of the six seasons in the Milwaukee Six-Pack. This download brings those articles together, edited for redundancy and then compiled to create a narrative of the entire era.

The Milwaukee Brewers of 1978-83 were--and remain--a beloved team to an entire region. I hope these articles can do them a little bit of justice.

NOTE TO A YOUNGER GENERATION

If you're reading this download, the odds are you know this already. But the major league baseball landscape was quite different than it is today, particularly with regard to the Milwaukee Brewers.

First off, they were in the American League. The franchise did not shift to the National League until 1998.

There was also no Central Division in existence in either league prior to 1994. Each league was simply an East and a West. The Brewers were in the AL East.

Finally, and most important, only the division winners went to the postseason, moving directly into the League Championship Series.

This latter fact clearly impacted everyone, but to study the late 1970s and early 1980s is to realize its unique impact on Milwaukee. Like the other teams in their region, they had to align with one of the coasts. The math said that the Brewers and Chicago White Sox had to go separate paths. Chicago went to the AL West. Milwaukee to the AL East.

The AL East was where the muscle was in baseball. The Yankees were at one of their many franchise peaks. The Red Sox were very good. So were the Orioles. The Tigers were up and coming. This division routinely produced the very best teams in baseball.

If the alignment decisions had been reversed and the Brewers had been in the West, they would have won four division crowns in this era instead of the one they took home in the East. And the strength of their division will be a common theme throughout these articles.

1978

The city of Milwaukee got major league baseball back in 1970, after losing the Braves to Atlanta following the 1965 season. The first eight years with the Brewers were rough—no winning seasons, and seemingly little hope for the future, after losing 95 games in 1977. No one

expected what was coming in 1978. The Brewers made an immediate turnaround and started a six-year run that continues to define franchise history.

Milwaukee went through an offseason of change. They hired Harry Dalton as general manager. Dalton had worked for the Baltimore Orioles and he brought Oriole pitching coach George Bamberger with him to manage the Brewers. Then Dalton got down to the business of remaking the roster.

The new GM traded Jim Slaton, one of the better starting pitchers the Brewers had, as part of a deal to get outfielder Ben Oglivie from the Detroit Tigers. Dalton picked up catcher Buck Martinez in a minor trade with St. Louis. He bought the contract of outfielder Gorman Thomas from the Texas Rangers. And most important, at least for 1978, is that he went on the free agent market and signed outfielder Larry Hisle.

Hisle had a huge year in '78, hitting 34 home runs and driving in 115 runs. He finished third in the MVP voting. Thomas hit 32 home runs and drove in 86 runs. Oglivie finished with a stat line of .370 on-base percentage and .497 slugging percentage. Martinez stabilized the catching position. Yes, it's fair to say Dalton's moves worked out pretty well.

Nor were the new players the only ones who could hit. Veteran third baseman Sal Bando had an on-base percentage of .371 and popped 17 home runs. Sixto Lezcano, the 24-year-old right fielder posted a .377/.459 stat line, while first baseman Cecil Cooper' was at .359/.474. Don Money was a reliable bat either at DH, off the bench and in a variety of roles.

Have we forgotten anyone? Well, you may have heard of the middle infield tandem. Robin Yount was only 22-years-old at shortstop, but already entering his fifth major league season. He hit .293. And the second baseman was 21-year-old rookie Paul Molitor, who swiped 30 bases and finished second in the Rookie of the Year voting. Yount and Molitor would become the franchise's greatest stars and go on to Cooperstown.

Milwaukee's offense was the most productive in the league, no small thing when you consider the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees each had great teams in 1978. But it was the Brewers who set the pace in runs scored, along with the component pieces of on-base percentage, slugging percentage, home runs and batting average.

At the top of the starting rotation was 22-game winner Mike Caldwell, a savvy lefthander who worked over 290 innings, posted a 2.36 ERA and finished second in the Cy Young voting. Lary Sorensen won 18 games, worked 280 innings and had a respectable ERA of 3.21. Caldwell and Sorensen combined to throw forty complete games in 1978.

It was the rest of the pitching below Caldwell and Sorensen that held the Brewers back. The back end of the rotation and the bullpen were unreliable and the Brewers finished with a staff ERA that was just 8th in the American League

Milwaukee opened the season against Dalton and Bamberger's old friends in Baltimore, who had contended to the final weekend in 1977. And the new Brewer offense absolutely unloaded, scoring 40 runs in a stunning three-game display. They followed that sweep by taking a two-game set from the defending World Series champion Yankees.

The 5-0 start got people excited, but a road trip to Boston, Baltimore and New York wasn't as kind. Milwaukee lost eight of ten, before righting the ship with a three-game sweep of the Kansas City Royals, a playoff perennial in the late 1970s.

By Memorial Day, the Brewers were a respectable 22-20. By today's standards that would have a team squarely in the playoff hunt. But the rules prior to 1993 split the leagues into two divisions, with only winners advancing directly to the League Championship Series. Milwaukee was in the AL East, where Boston and New York were setting the pace and the Brewers faced a 7 ½ game deficit.

But just playing winning baseball was a refreshing change and Milwaukee kicked it up a notch in the early part of the summer. They ripped off an 11-1 stretch in June that put them ten games over .500 and they stayed well above that threshold the rest of the way.

They finished off the first half with a three-game series against the Yankees. The Friday night opener pitted Caldwell against New York ace Ron Guidry, who was having one of the great seasons of all-time and would end up with the Cy Young Award. On this night, Caldwell was the one who threw a four-hit shutout. Hise hit two homers and Milwaukee won 6-0. They swept the now-reeling Yanks and were in second place at the All-Star break.

Boston was insanely hot in the first half of 1978 and still led the AL East by nine games. The Red Sox started what would be a historic collapse in July. Milwaukee won nine of their first eleven out of the break and closed the margin to 4 ½ games. But now it was New York that was getting started on a scorching run of baseball. Over an 11-game stretch with both the Yanks and Red Sox in August, the Brewers went 3-8.

Any hopes of winning the AL East realistically ended there, but Milwaukee didn't give away their hard-earned progress of the first four months. They answered that slump with a 9-2 stretch and were sitting with a 78-58 record on Labor Day. And they continued to roll through September, mostly against teams from the AL West. They did have a two-game set in the Bronx and Caldwell *again* threw a shutout to beat Guidry, who only lost one other game outside of the times the Brewer ace beat him.

Milwaukee finished with a record of 93-69. By the standards of today, it would have been enough to make the playoffs. By the standards of 1978, it would have been enough to win the AL West, where the Royals won with a 92-70 mark. But in the East it was only enough to be six

games out and join the rest of baseball in watching the epic one-game Yankees-Red Sox playoff.

But it was also enough to energize a fan base. The Brewers had arrived.

1979

In 1979, the Brewers showed they were no fluke, stepping it up to 95 wins, even if the structure and format of MLB at that time continued to keep them out of the postseason.

The Brewers were fueled by a potent offense. Thomas hit 45 home runs to lead the league and drove in 123 runs. Lezcano batted .321, hit 28 homers and finished with 101 RBI. Molitor hit 22 home runs and stole 33 bases. Cooper, the steady first baseman, hit .308, drove in 106 runs and popped 24 homers of his own.

Charlie Moore took over the catching job at age 26 and was another .300 hitter. Ben Oglivie provided more muscle, hitting 29 home runs. The quality of the lineup can be underscored by this—shortstop Yount, the greatest player in the history of the franchise, had a bad year in 1979. Hisle tore a rotator cuff in early May and saw his career effectively ended. And the Brewers *still* scored more runs in 1979 (807) than they had in 1978 (804).

Offense across the league was up, so Milwaukee still slipped from leading the league in runs scored in '78 to fourth this time around. But that makes the pitching improvement all the more impressive, where they jumped from 8th to 4th in staff ERA.

Caldwell and Sorensen were the 1-2 in the rotation. Neither was as good as they had been in '78, but both were still very effective. Caldwell won 16 games with a 3.29 ERA, while Sorensen added 15 wins and an ERA of 3.98. The difference is that, unlike 1978, there was more depth to the staff.

Jim Slaton had been traded for Oglivie prior to 1978, but returned to Milwaukee via free agency for this season and was another 15-game winner. Bill Travers had a solid year, with 14 wins. Both had sub-4.00 ERAs, giving manager Bamberger some steady balance in his rotation. Bill Castro, Jerry Augustine and Bob McClure were reliable, if unspectacular arms, out of the bullpen.

The schedule-makers put the Brewers to the test early, with the first 15 games against the Yankees, Red Sox and Orioles. Milwaukee played to mixed reviews, going 7-8. But they took advantage against the lower half of the AL East, with a 13-6 run against the Blue Jays, Tigers and Indians. By Memorial Day, the Brewers were 26-21 and four games off the pace being set by Baltimore.

The AL East was a four-team race coming into the early part of the summer. The Yankees started to fade, while the Orioles and Red Sox began to separate. The Brewers again took advantage of the lower half of the division, with a 7-1 stretch against Toronto, Detroit and Cleveland going into the All-Star break. The spurt kept Milwaukee in third place, within six games of the lead.

In late July, all three division powers were coming into old County Stadium. New York was up first and on a Friday night, the Brewers had coughed up a 5-3 lead and were in a 5-5 game, facing the Yankees' Hall of Fame closer Goose Gossage. With two outs in the ninth, Cooper ripped a walkoff blast that jumpstarted a sweep. The Yankee season went from frustrating on the field to tragic off of it, with catcher Thurman Munson dying when his private plane crashed just a few days later.

That left the Red Sox and Orioles and the next eight games were as forgettable a stretch as Milwaukee fans—a group that's seen some ugly Augusts over the years—have ever dealt with. They lost three straight to Baltimore, four of five to Boston and were effectively out of contention by the time the homestand ended.

But it was only the quality of the competition that was the reason for being out of the race. The Brewers reached Labor Day with a record of 82-56, the third-best in all of baseball, behind only the eventual World Series teams from Baltimore and Pittsburgh.

That more or less held to the end of the season. The Montreal Expos slipped past Milwaukee for the third-best record, but the Brewers' final mark of 95-66 was the fourth-best in the game. But in the ruthless world of the late 1970s AL East, it was still eight games shy of the mark.

1980

1980 was a disappointment. The Brewers continued to play winning baseball, but injuries and bullpen problems led to regression in the won-loss column.



This Milwaukee team could still hit. The '80 edition finished third in the American League in runs scored, and excelled at most everything except drawing walks—which, in all fairness, was not emphasized the way it is in today's game.

Cooper hit .352, second in the American League and the first baseman finished fifth in the MVP voting. Oglivie's 41 home runs tied for the league lead. Yount played terrific all-around baseball, leading the league in doubles and scoring 121 runs. Thomas bashed 38 home runs. Moore and Gantner weren't

feared hitters, but with batting averages of .291 and .282 respectively, they weren't easy outs in a lineup like this.

But Molitor missed 50 games, and his penchant for getting on the disabled list eventually prompted a move to get him away from his second base spot. Lezcano first missed 50 games of his own and then had a bad year when he was healthy.

The starting pitching was good enough to compensate—Moose Haas came into his own at the age of 24 and won 16 games with a 3.10 ERA. Caldwell logged 225 innings and won 13. Sorensen churned out 12 wins and nearly 200 innings. Travers was competent at the back end of the rotation and the Brewers got some respectable spot start work from Paul Mitchell and Reggie Cleveland.

But the bullpen was woefully lacking in depth. McClure and Castro were functionable arms, but at a time when the closer's role was becoming ever-more popular—and also one that would be utilized as early as the seventh and eighth inning, the Brewers were woefully deficient. And the division they were in continued to be merciless.

The season started off in exciting fashion. Lezcano came up with the bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth in a 5-5 tie against the Red Sox. He poked a grand slam down the right field line. The Brewers went on to take two of three in New York. But they were also swept three straight at home by lowly Toronto. At the Memorial Day turn, Milwaukee's record was 19-18, four games off a pace being set by the Yanks.

An East Coast trip in June went well, as the Brewers went 5-2 on a run through Boston and Baltimore. They went 9-5 on a long road trip that included AL West power Kansas City and the West Coast. But the bullpen weakness was most evident by three walkoff losses. Milwaukee's record was a solid 43-34 at the All-Star break, but New York was the best team in the majors and held a seven-game lead.

In the late part of July it became apparent that Baltimore, rather than Milwaukee, would be the one to make a run at New York in the second half. The Brewers lost five of six games to the Orioles. Milwaukee also dropped five of eight to New York. For good measure, they dumped three of four in Fenway.

There were some good moments—a four-game sweep in Cleveland saw the bats get unleashed and score 10-plus runs twice. But the problems against the league's upper crust continued to be evident when Kansas City came to town in late August. The Royals won three straight, including one game where George Brett went 5-for-5 and lifted his average to .407. It was the highwater mark of Brett's pursuit of .400, and he eventually "slipped" to .390.

During this long hot summer, manager George Bamberger, whose arrival in 1978 coincided with the arrival of winning baseball, stepped down. Buck Rodgers took his place. The Brewers

showed life in September, even though they were miles off the pace of the Yankees and Orioles, who each hit the 100-win threshold.

Milwaukee went 17-12 down the stretch. They ended the season the way they had begun—with some walkoff drama for the home fans. Oglivie hit his 41st home run in the ninth to tie the game 4-4 and tie him with Reggie Jackson for the AL home run title. The Brewers eventually won in 15 innings and finished the season 86-76.

It was a fun ending, but did not overshadow the disappointment that Brewer fans felt. They were used to contention and wanted to see their team get over the hump.

1981 BREAKTHROUGH

It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon in Milwaukee on October 3, 1981 and the city was rife with anticipation. The Brewers were on the verge of making the postseason for the first time in franchise history, and for the season's penultimate game a big pitching matchup awaited.

Brewer ace Pete Vuckovich would go toe-to-toe with Detroit Tigers' rising star Jack Morris. A Brewer victory would put them in the playoffs. A loss meant tomorrow's finale would be winner-take-all for the chance to play the New York Yankees.

1981 had been a weird year for major league baseball. A players' strike in June had ripped the summer out of the season and play didn't resume until August. Faced with the challenge of reinvigorating interest in the game, commissioner Bowie Kuhn tried a novel idea.

In an era where each league was split into just an East & West division with only the first-place teams advancing, Kuhn declared the teams in first place at the strike to be "first-half champions." The remainder of the schedule would determine the second-half champion and the two winners would then play a best-of-five to advance to the League Championship Series.

The system had its flaws, to be sure. The Cincinnati Reds would finish with the best record in baseball, but come in second in both halves. But even the best record came with an asterisk—the four first-half winners—the Yankees, Oakland A's, Philadelphia Phillies and Los Angeles Dodgers had no incentive in the second half.

Due to the need to guarantee television a full slate of opening-round series, if any of the first-half winners won the second half they would get an additional home game—but still have to play whomever finished second in the second-half.

But flawed or not, it was probably the best Kuhn could do, given the need to get people talking about baseball and the realities of television.

After the disappointment of 1980, Harry Dalton struck with a blockbuster trade. He dealt four players to St. Louis—a mix of highly regarded prospects and regulars—to St. Louis in exchange for starting pitcher Pete Vuckovich, veteran catcher Ted Simmons and the big prize—closer Rollie Fingers.

Milwaukee had been right in the thick of the race when the strike hit. Even with the acquisition of Vuckovich and Fingers, offense was still the team's calling card. They finished second in the American League in runs scored, thanks to a power attack that underwent a nickname metamorphous over a five-year period.

When George Bamberger oversaw the team's resurgence, the hitters were "Bambi's Bombers." When the skipper resigned after 1980 and handed the reins to Buck Rodgers they were "Buck's Bombers."

Cooper was the key to the offense in 1981, hitting .320 and slashing 35 doubles. Milwaukee's ability to drive the ball in the gaps was often overlooked, but it supported the home runs, which were led by Thomas, who hit 21 in the 109-game schedule.

The table was set by Molitor and Yount, both of whom were beginning Hall of Fame careers and Yount was a year away from the first of his two MVP awards. Ogilvie had tied for the home run title in 1980 and though Simmons struggled much of '81, he'd been a good hitter throughout his career and would be again for next season.

Vuckovich gave the rotation an anchor, winning 14 games. Caldwell won 11 more, as did Haas, although the latter's 4.46 ERA meant the team's run support had a lot to do with his wins.

But no one mattered more than Fingers. The last two innings of games had previously been reasons for Milwaukee fans to drown themselves in Miller beer to avoid the agony. Now it was lights-out time. Fingers racked up 28 saves, posted a 1.04 ERA and would be rewarded with both the Cy Young and MVP awards in his first year in Milwaukee.

At the start of September, Milwaukee swept four games on the road in Minnesota, a sign they were ready to make a move down the stretch. They won two of three at home against Baltimore and they went on the road for a nine-game homestand against the Orioles, Red Sox & Tigers—the three teams they were in direct competition with for first place, as the Yankees had played like a team with no incentive to win.

Milwaukee went 5-4 on the homestand to survive and came home. Vuckovich then beat Boston 1-0 and the Brewers eliminated the Red Sox. The Orioles fell by the wayside. It was down to Milwaukee and Detroit and their weekend series to close the year would be a de facto 2-of-3 playoff.

Haas pitched the game of his life on Friday night, going the distance, and the Brewer offense peppered Detroit starter Dan Petry. Milwaukee got the scoring started in the second in typical fashion—Ogilvie hit a two-run homer. They broke it open two innings later in atypical fashion—a walk and three singles, including a two-RBI base hit from Yount and the final score would be 8-2.

Thus we came to Saturday. Detroit's Morris would build a reputation as one of the premier big-game pitchers. Both he and Vuckovich had the reputation of being better than their ERAs—they could get key outs and pitch to the scoreboard, something that would have infuriated the sabermetrics movement that was still several years away from notoriety.

Regardless, they put on a great battle on a sunny Saturday afternoon in old County Stadium. Cooper had an excellent series—over Friday and Saturday he delivered four hits, but his normally stellar defense failed him in the sixth. A Cooper error opened the door to the game's first run and it was still 1-0 Detroit when Milwaukee came to bat in the eighth.

In light of the reputation the team's offense already had and which would grow even stronger a year later, the rally the Brewers put together is ironic. Molitor drew a walk. Yount put down a bunt that Detroit flubbed. Cooper came up and bunted. The Tigers again flubbed it.



Now it was bases-loaded and no one out. Simmons hit a ground ball to weak to be a double play ball and the speedy Molitor scored the tying run, with only the out at first recorded. After an intentional walk, Thomas lofted a sac fly for the winning run. The Brewers had taken a 2-1 lead without ever getting a clean hit.

There was no irony whatsoever in how the game ended. Fingers had pitched the eighth and was in line for the win. He retired the side in order, striking out Lou Whitaker to close the win and send Milwaukee into celebration. A Division Series

showdown with the Yankees was on deck and the entire city was ready.

1981 ALDS

The Yankees and Brewers met at County Stadium in prime-time. New York had a former Cy Young winner, lefty Ron Guidry, while Milwaukee would rely on Haas.

Milwaukee got after Guidry in the second, with a two-out double from Bando and an RBI base hit from Moore. In the third, Jim Gantner doubled off Guidry to start the inning. Paul Molitor laid down a sac bunt that was flubbed and the Brewers had runners on the corners.

It might have been a big inning, but Guidry settled down. Yount picked up Gantner with a sac fly, but at 2-0, the Yankees had the bats to bet back into it. And that's what they did immediately, starting in the top of the fourth.

After Haas walked Reggie Jackson, Oscar Gamble went deep and the game was quickly tied. Then Bob Watson singled and pesky Larry Milbourne beat out an infield hit. Rick Cerone doubled to clear the bases. Haas was gone and the Brewers were staring at a 4-2 hole.

Milwaukee's offense got Guidry out of the game in the fifth, when the sequence of a Yount single, a walk of Cecil Cooper and a base hit by Ted Simmons made it 4-3. New York manager Bob Lemon called in his hard-throwing young reliever Ron Davis.

The move paid off—Davis got out of the inning with the one-run lead intact and he worked 2.2 innings of perfect baseball. Milwaukee never threatened again, and New York picked up an insurance run in the ninth to win it 5-3.

Game 2 was in the afternoon. Both teams sent lefthanders to the hill, although that was about all Dave Righetti and Caldwell had in common. New York's Righetti was a hard-throwing young arm. Caldwell was a veteran finesse pitcher. Both were brilliant on this day.

The Yankees' Lou Piniella got to Caldwell for a two-out home run in the fourth inning and into the seventh inning, the 1-0 game stood up, with nary a threat from either side. In the bottom of the seventh, Davis came on, but lacked the control of the previous night. Two walks and a single loaded the bases.

New York was stacked in the bullpen, and Lemon simply upgraded to closer Goose Gossage, a future Hall of Famer. With one out, Gossage got Yount to pop up and struck out Cooper. In the top of the ninth, the Yankees got a two-run blast from Jackson.

The insurance runs weren't technically needed, although they undoubtedly improved Lemon's peace of mind when the Brewers got singles from Bando and Molitor with one out in the ninth. But Yount again popped out, Gossage slammed the door and with the 3-0 win. The Brewers had missed their chance at home and were staring at an 0-2 hole. The balance of the series would be on the weekend in the Bronx.

There was no travel day for Brewers-Yanks, so this would be a doubleheader day in the ALDS. Oakland and Kansas City played the afternoon game and the A's closed out a three-game sweep. The Brewers were hoping that Friday night wouldn't end a day of a sweep on both coasts.

Nothing in the pitching matchup could give Milwaukee fans optimism. The Yankees had their terrific veteran lefty Tommy John, while the Brewers put their season into the hands of

journeyman Randy Lerch.

But Lerch was terrific. New York got a run in the fourth when Bob Watson delivered a two-out RBI single, but even with John pitching great, the Yankee lead was only 1-0 into the seventh. And then the Brewer offense awoke.

It started small, with an infield hit by Cooper, but quickly went big, as Simmons homered for a 2-1 Milwaukee lead. Gorman Thomas singled, and was sacrificed up by Ben Ogilvie. Bando drove in the run with a single and Milwaukee had a 3-1 lead, with the league MVP—closer Rollie Fingers—in reserve.

But Fingers struggled in the seventh, and New York got four straight one-out singles from Watson, Milbourne, Cerone and Willie Randolph to immediately tie the game back up. Milwaukee could have been forgiven for folding—but they didn't—Molitor homered to start the eighth and put his team right back on top.

Yount beat out an infield hit. John was removed, and Simmons again had a big RBI, this time a double for a 5-3 lead. Given a reprieve, Fingers rolled through the eighth and ninth. We would come back to Yankee Stadium on Saturday.

Vuckovich shouldered his team's fate against New York's Rick Reuschel, who had been the ace of some disappointing Cubs' teams in the late 1970s and now had the chance to be on the October stage.

Both pitchers rolled through three innings and the Brewers began chipping away in the fourth. Molitor and Yount both singled. A sac fly from Cooper plated the first run and Ogilvie's two-out double staked Vuckovich to a 2-zip lead.

An error and a double by Dave Winfield gave the Yankees second and third with no outs in the sixth. Vuckovich was removed for lefthander Jamie Easterly. It wasn't a long or noteworthy career for Easterly, but this is at or near the top of his greatest moments. He struck out Jackson, and even though Piniella picked up one run with an RBI groundout, Easterly had maintained the lead.

And a Brewer tag-team of Jim Slaton from the right side, Bob McClure from the left and eventually Fingers, slammed the door. Milwaukee won 2-1 and this strange series, with the road team winning every game, would go to a decisive finale on Sunday night.

It was a Hass-Guidry rematch and the Brewers again showed they could hit the renowned Yankee ace. Thomas homered in the second. In the third, utility man Ed Romero singled, Molitor walked, Young legged out an infield hit, Cooper picked up the RBI with a sac fly and it was 2-0...just like it had been in Game 1.

And just like the opener, Haas couldn't hold the lead and it was the fourth inning, with the Jackson/Gamble duo doing the Brewer pitcher in. It began with a leadoff single from Milbourne. Jackson then went deep to tie the game and Gamble immediately followed with a home run to put New York on top.

Haas was gone and Caldwell was in, but the Brewer lefty didn't have the stuff of Game 2. Graig Nettles and Watson each singled and with runners on the corners, Rick Cerone picked up the RBI with a productive ground ball.

It was still only 4-2, and just like Game 1, the Brewers got a run back. In the seventh inning, with Righetti on for Guidry, Yount tripled and came in on a Cooper base hit. But New York immediately answered when Cerone took Slaton deep.

In a battle of teams with great closers, it was New York who turned a lead over to Gossage, while Fingers could only watch. The Goose gave up a couple walks in the eighth, but got Don Money to fly out and keep the 5-3 lead. New York tacked on two insurance runs in the bottom of the inning, and it was all over, but the shouting, ending 7-3.

Losing a decisive game is disappointing under any circumstances, especially when you had the early lead. But there was no regret over the season as a whole. And the best was still to come.

1982

1982 had the feel of a must-win year. The Brewers were stacked with veteran in the everyday lineup and in the rotation. They had playoff experience under their belt. If they were going to make the franchise's first World Series it was now or never.

Milwaukee's potent offense unloaded in 1982. The Brewers went deep 216 times and finished first in the AL in slugging percentage, making up for a more average #6 ranking in the league in on-base percentage

Cooper, Ogilvie, Simmons and Thomas all hit 30-plus homers. Molitor, popped 19. And Molitor was a great table-setter, with a .366 OPB and stealing 41 bases. If you got to the bottom of the order, Gantner wasn't exactly an easy out—he hit .295.

But no one was better than Robin Yount. The shortstop finished with an OBP of .379 and a slugging percentage of .578. Yount hit 29 home runs and produced 114 RBIs. His rangy defense was a big asset in the field, and he was a deserving winner of the AL MVP award.

The greatness of the lineup masked a pitching staff that was decent at best. The starting

pitching had some good veterans at the top. Vuckovich finished 18-6 with a 3.34 ERA and won the Cy Young Award, although that was as much the product of a relatively weak field. Mike Caldwell won 17 games and finished with a 3.91 ERA.

The rest of the rotation was a mishmash, with inconsistent veterans ranging from Haas to McClure to Doc Medich to Lerch taking their turns on the mound.

But the bullpen was in the good hands of Fingers. He saved 29 games with a 2.60 ERA. Between Vuckovich, Caldwell, Fingers and the offense, the Brewers had enough to win games.

It didn't start right away though. There was a five-game losing streak in mid-April. Then on May 10, the Brewers started a stretch where they lost 14 of 21 games to AL West opponents. On June 1, the day after Memorial Day, they were 23-24. In this must-win year, Milwaukee was in sixth place in an AL East that was then seven teams.

The only saving grace is that the division leaders—the Tigers and Red Sox—weren't long-term contenders. But the Brewers were still seven games out and the front office fired manager Buck Rodgers. Harvey Kuenn, the batting coach, was elevated to take over. And the Brewer season turned around.

Milwaukee faced a crisis in the standings, but they also faced a crisis of nickname. They started as Bambi's Bombers and smoothly transitioned to Buck's Bombers. But Harvey Kuenn? That didn't naturally fit. Cooper came to the rescue and coined the name Harvey's Wallbangers". That's the name that lives on in history with this team.

And on the field, they relaxed and turned it around. June 10 started a stretch where Milwaukee won 20 of 28 games. By the All-Star break, they were 48-35 and had pulled into a first-place tie with Boston. Detroit had faded, while the Orioles—the more feared long-term threat—were within 3 ½ games.

The Brewers stayed consistent through August, going 19-11 and arrived at Labor Day in first place with a three-game lead on the Orioles and were plus 3 ½ on the Red Sox. But the biggest news was developments in the pitching staff—one positive and one negative that took place as the calendar turned from August to September.

Fingers had been developing elbow problems and in early September he was sidelined. There were always reports he might make it back, but it never came and this injury effectively ended the career of the future Hall of Famer.

On a more positive note, help was on the way for the rotation. Milwaukee packaged up three prospects and sent them to the Houston Astros. In return came Don Sutton, a veteran of the excellent Los Angeles Dodgers teams in the late 1970. Sutton made seven starts for Milwaukee and went 4-1 with a 3.29 ERA.

And the Brewers needed the reinforcements because Baltimore was coming. The Red Sox faded in September and on the season's penultimate weekend, Milwaukee was still holding a three-game lead, but there were seven games with the Orioles on deck in the ten days. It started with a three-game series in old County Stadium in Milwaukee.

Baltimore got to Sutton for four runs in the first inning of the opener, but Yount answered with a two-run blast in the bottom of the first. The Brewers tied it by the third, scored five times in the fourth and won 15-6. But on Saturday, the Orioles again grabbed four in the first and this time there was no comeback. Baltimore won the finale on Sunday and the Milwaukee lead was down to two games.

Milwaukee took two of three in Fenway Park, nudging the lead back to three games. They would close the season in Baltimore, a doubleheader on Friday and then on Saturday and Sunday afternoon. One win would clinch the AL East.

Memorial Stadium was a madhouse, with Baltimore fans waving brooms and chanting for a sweep. And the Brewers seemed ready to roll over in the face of it. On Friday, both Vuckovich and Caldwell fell behind early. Medich got rocked on Saturday. The Brewers lost the first three games by a combined 26-7.

It would come to one game, winner-take-all. This had happened only once before in baseball history, where a showdown came in the last game of the regular season—the 1949 race between the Red Sox and New York Yankees. The 1982 showdown was even better—two future Hall of Famers, Sutton and the Orioles' Jim Palmer would be on the mound. And Baltimore's legendary manager Earl Weaver had already announced his retirement at the end of the season. It was a lot for Milwaukee to overcome.



Enter Yount. He stepped in against Palmer in the first inning and took a solo home run the other way. Yount homered to center in the third, and in the eighth inning he tripled and scored. The Brewers clung to a 5-1 lead with Sutton pitching well.

Sutton then walked two batters and gave a hit in the bottom of the eighth, to cut the lead to 5-2. Joe Nolan came up to pinch hit with two outs and runners on the corners. Nolan laced a low line drive into the left field corner. It looked certain to score two more runs. Instead, Ogilvie went sliding feet first and made the catch, as his legs rolled up the wall that was on the right on top of the foul line.

The rally was turned back, and the Brewers scored five times in the top of the ninth. At last, the AL East title was put away. They hadn't made it easy, but Milwaukee had won one of baseball's

historic games and punched their ticket to the American League Championship Series against the California Angels.

1982 ALCS

California hosted the first two games and the ALCS began with both teams sending a pair of veteran lefties to the mound. Tommy John was now in an Angels uniform and on the mound for Game 1. The Brewers answered with Caldwell.

It didn't take long for California to get after Caldwell—Brian Downing led off the first with a single, and after an error and wild pitch, Don Baylor picked up the game's first run with a sac fly.

Milwaukee showed their power in the second inning. After a leadoff single from Simmons, Thomas went deep. The Brewers added another run in the third when Molitor and Yount each singled with one out and Cooper produced a productive ground ball for a 3-1 lead.

Caldwell couldn't hold the lead, with Downing again leading off the inning and getting it started. He singled, then Doug DeCinces and Bobby Grich each did the same. Baylor cleared the bases with a triple to make it 4-3, and came in to score on a groundball out by Reggie Jackson.

The Angels kept coming in the fourth. A leadoff single from Bob Boone chased Caldwell. A Molitor error was followed by a walk, and a two-run single from Baylor. It might have been worse, if not for a line drive double play off the bat of Jackson. The score was 7-3 and though California didn't score again, John settled in and locked down the Brewers the rest of the way, with a complete-game seven-hitter.

Milwaukee turned to Vuckovich in Game 2. He faced Bruce Kison, a veteran of the 1979 Pittsburgh Pirates championship team. Vuckovich was not sharp. In the second inning, he gave up a single to Fred Lynn, a double to DeCinces and a two-run single to Tim Foli, another veteran of that '79 Pirate team. One inning later, Jackson took Vuckovich deep. In the fourth, DeCinces walked, Grich singled and a Foli bunt set up a sac fly.

Meanwhile, Kison was containing the potent Milwaukee lineup. The Brewers broke through in the fifth when, with a man aboard, Molitor hit one to the wall in center, kept running and wound up with an inside-the-park home run. Both pitchers settled in though, and the Angels kept their 4-2 margin and seemed to have an ironclad grip on this ALCS.

After a day off, the teams flew to the Midwest and on a beautiful Friday afternoon in Milwaukee (at age 12, living in the city's west suburbs, I was at this game), the Brewers sent veteran Don Sutton to the mound. Sutton had won a winner-take-all game for the AL East title in Baltimore the previous Sunday and now again held his team's fate in his hands.

Sutton was ready, and so was California's 18-game winner Geoff Zahn. The game was scoreless into the bottom of the fourth, when the Brewers broke through. Yount drew a walk to start the inning and Cooper doubled him home. Simmons singled and runners were on the corners. Thomas picked up another run with a sac fly. Ben Ogilvie singled to right and reset the bases with men on each corner. Don Money came up with a sac fly. The Brewers were renowned for their power, but good situational hitting in this inning gave Sutton a 3-0 lead.

Sutton got some insurance in the seventh when Money walked and Molitor hit a two-out home run. The insurance was needed, because the Angels rallied in the eighth. Boone started it with a solo blast. Rod Carew singled with one out. Consecutive doubles from Lynn and Baylor suddenly made it a 5-3 game and the tying run was at the plate.

Milwaukee manager Kuenn summoned Pete Ladd, the young arm thrust into the closer's job after a September injury to Fingers, a future Hall of Fame reliever. Ladd was up to the moment, closing down the eighth, and retiring the side in order in the ninth. The Brewers were still alive.

I was back out at old County Stadium on Saturday, although the weather wasn't as nice. It was a dank and cloudy afternoon, and the quality of play wasn't nearly as good on the field. California put John back out on short rest.

Manager Gene Mauch had a good 21-year-old righthander in Mike Witt, but decided to take his chances with John and Kison—both battle-tested playoff veterans—on short rest. It was a logical decision, but John didn't have it, and his team did not play well behind him.

In the second inning, after a walk to Simmons and a one-out walk to Money, the California defense came undone. Mark Brouhard, a right-handed hitting platoon hitter in to face John, singled to center. That scored one run, but Lynn came up throwing to third and threw it away. That scored another run. Brouhard kept running. One more throwing error brought him all the way around. For the second day in a row, the Brewers were up 3-0.

John continued to struggle in the fourth. With runners on first and second and one out, a wild pitch moved the runners up. After an intentional walk, *another* wild pitch brought in a run and put runners on second and third. A base hit from Jim Gantner made it 5-0 and John was pulled. A ground ball out by Molitor tacked on one more run before it was over.

Meanwhile, Haas was on his game and not until the sixth did the Angels rally. A walk to Downing set up a two-out double from Lynn and California's first run. But the Brewers immediately answered, with Brouhard doubling and then scoring on another RBI single from Gantner.

The Brewers were cruising, but just as had been the case on Friday, the eighth inning made it interesting. Base hits from Downing and Carew, then a walk to Lynn loaded the bases. Baylor

came to the plate and hit a grand slam. In the blink of an eye, it was 7-5 and Slaton was summoned to preserve the lead.

Brouhard came up in the bottom of the eighth. A workmanlike reserve, he was already having the game of his life, and with a man aboard he sealed with a two-run blast that opened the lead back up. Slaton closed the door on the 9-5 win—the last out appropriately coming on a fly ball to Brouhard.

Sunday afternoon was another nice October day in Wisconsin (though I would be in front of the TV set rather than out at County for this one). The pitching matchup was another Kison-Vuckovich battle, as the Brewers brought out their own ace on short rest for Game 5.

For the second straight start though, Vuckovich was slow getting started. Downing greeted him with a double to start the game, and scored on a two-out hit from Lynn. Milwaukee also looked sloppy—prior to scoring, Downing had gotten to third base because Molitor threw errantly to second base after a line drive out, seeking a double play. And after Lynn's single, he was able to take second on a throwing error from Ogilvie.

However sloppy, the game was still just 1-0 and Molitor started the Brewers' own first inning with a double. He moved up on a grounder by Yount and scored on a sac fly from Simmons. Tie game.

Lynn was insanely hot during this ALCS and hit .611 for the series. In the third inning, he drilled another two-out RBI single, bringing in Boone. In the fourth, the Angels added another run. DeCinces doubled to start the inning and then Cooper booted a sac bunt attempt. A single by Boone made it 3-1, but Vuckovich got out of it with a double play ball off the bat of Grich.

Ogilvie was the everyday left fielder and back in the lineup today for Brouhard because a right handed pitcher was on the mound. Ogilvie was also a terrific power hitter and he took Kison deep in the bottom of the fourth to cut the lead to 3-2.

It was there the score stayed through the middle innings. A California threat in the fifth was cut off when Jackson tried to go first-to-third on yet another single from Lynn, and Milwaukee right fielder Charlie Moore threw Reggie out at third. Kison came out of the game after five innings, a curious decision in light of California's lack of bullpen depth.

Luis Sanchez was still one of Mauch's better relievers and he was on the mound in the seventh. With one out, Moore legged out an infield hit and Gantner singled to center. With two outs, Yount worked a walk. It brought Cooper to the plate.

The left-handed hitting Cooper slapped a line drive into left field. It seemed to hang in the air briefly, as though it might be playable for Downing. The TV cameras caught Cooper using his hands to try and will the ball down, in the same way Carlton Fisk had tried to wave his

memorable 1975 World Series home run fair. It worked as well for Cooper as it had for Fisk. The ball dropped. Two runs scored and Milwaukee was ahead 4-3.

Bob McClure, the Brewers' left handed option out of the pen, got through the eighth and started the ninth. He quickly gave up a leadoff single to pinch-hitter Ron Jackson. Each manager made moves. Mauch inserted pinch-runner Rob Wilfong and Kuenn went to Ladd.

A sacrifice bunt gave the top of the order two chances to tie the game. Downing grounded out to Molitor. Up next was Carew, the best pure contact hitter of his era. He slapped a hard ground ball to the left side. It went right at Yount, who made the play and the celebration was on in Milwaukee.

The Brewers were on their way to a Suds Series. The Cardinals had won the National League pennant, so two of America's great brewing cities would play for the championship. It was an ironic matchup, given the magnitude of the trade less than two years ago. And from the perspective of history, we know these two teams are now divisional rivals in the NL Central.

In the world of the 1980s, the Brewers and Cardinals would play a World Series that might have lacked the historic moments that other Fall Classics later this decade would have. But start to finish, it would be the most competitive, well-played Series of the 1980s.

1982 WORLD SERIES

The National League held home field advantage by virtue of the rotation system that existed prior to 2003, and the trade-off was that American League rules were used throughout the Series—there would be a DH in all games.

Two veterans, Caldwell for Milwaukee and Bob Forsch for St. Louis got the call, and Milwaukee wasted no time getting after Forsch in the first inning. With one out, Yount singled and Cooper followed with a walk. With two outs, an error by normally sure handed Cardinal first baseman Keith Hernandez let in a run. Then Thomas, a big burly slugger had an RBI in an atypical high—he beat out in an infield hit. Caldwell took the mound with a 2-0 lead.

The Brewer lefty was razor-sharp and his team kept after Forsch. In the top of the fourth, Moore doubled down the left field line, was bunted to third and scored on a single by Molitor. One inning later, Simmons homered. In the sixth, Milwaukee broke it open. With two outs, Gantner singled to right. Then Molitor singled to left. Yount looped a double down the right field line, it was 6-0 and all but over.

Milwaukee still added four more runs in the ninth inning. Molitor finished with a World Series record of five hits and Yount, who followed him in the lineup had four hits. Caldwell threw a complete-game three-hitter and the 10-0 road win put St. Louis in a quick hole.

The Brewers looked in command for another reason—they were turning Sutton for Game 2, who had been outstanding since his acquisition at the end of August.



Milwaukee staked Sutton to an early lead, getting after untested John Stuper. In the second inning, Molitor continued his hot hitting, with a two-out double that scored Thomas.

In the third, Molitor singled, stole second, took third on a wild pitch and scored on a RBI groundout from Yount. With two outs, Simmons homered again. It was 3-0 and St. Louis was in serious trouble.

But in the bottom of that third inning, the Cardinals finally awoke. Dane Iorg, in the lineup as the DH singled to right. He was replaced on the bases by speedy Willie McGee after a ground ball forceout, and McGee stole second. A double by Tom Herr scored St. Louis' first run of the Series, and Ken Oberkfell then drove in Herr with a single to cut the lead to 3-2.

Yount chased Stuper with a leadoff double in the top of the fifth. Jim Kaat, a crafty veteran and former starter in his prime came on, but Cooper greeted Kaat with an RBI single.

Two months earlier the specter of Fingers might have started to loom in this game as it went to the sixth inning. Closers regularly came in as early as the eighth inning at this time and in a game like this, the seventh was a possibility. But Fingers was on the sidelines.

At a tie game was what we had by the end of six. Oberkfell singled and George Hendrick drew a two-out walk. Darrell Porter doubled into the left field corner to score both runs and it was 4-4.

In the bottom of the eighth, Milwaukee had lefty Bob McClure on the mound. He could not get two left-handed hitters, as Hernandez worked a walk and Porter singled. Pete Ladd, the right-hander and nominal closer came in and issued consecutive walks to Lonnie Smith and Steve Braun and St. Louis was ahead 5-4.

The inning might have been worse, but a line drive out off the bat of McGee was followed by Braun being called out after getting hit with a batted ball by Ozzie Smith, what would have been an RBI single. When Molitor started the top of the ninth with a bunt single, it looked like the lack of an insurance run might be big. But Porter completed his big night by throwing out Molitor on a stolen base attempt and closer Bruce Sutter slammed the door.

Milwaukee was alive for the first World Series games the city had seen in 25 years, when the Braves played there. This writer was living in the west suburbs and was at old County Stadium on a crisp, but pleasant Friday night. But for Brewer fans that night was anything but pleasant.

Vuckovich was on the mound for Milwaukee and facing Joaquin Andujar for St. Louis.

Both pitchers put up zeroes through four innings. It was Vuckovich, the Cy Young Award winner, that cracked first. In the fifth, Lonnie Smith doubled with one out. An error by Cooper was followed by a three-run blast from McGee, a pure contact hitter not known for his power.

McGee wasn't done. In the seventh inning, after Lonnie Smith had tripled and scored, McGee homered again. Milwaukee got two runs back in the eighth, when Cooper hit a two-run shot. But St. Louis added an insurance in the ninth against Vuckovich, still in the game. In the bottom of the ninth, McGee completed his dream night by robbing Thomas of a home run and the game ended 6-2.

Milwaukee had its turn getting a one-game lead in the World Series and then immediately taking the lead the next game. Now it was St. Louis' turn to come within a hair of putting a chokehold on the Series, only to let it slip away in Game 4.

Moose Haas was on the mound for the Brewers, and the Cardinals got after him immediately. Oberkfell doubled with one out in the first and Hendrick singled with two outs to pick up the run. In the second, McGee got rolling again with a one-out single and stolen base. A walk and wild pitch set up second and third. Herr then lifted a fly ball to deep center. It not only scored one run, and it scored *both*. Ozzie Smith, on second base, never stopped running and it was 3-0.

Before the inning was over, Oberkfell had walked, stolen second and scored on a Gantner error. The teams traded runs in the bottom of the fifth and top of the sixth, finally chasing Haas with the score 5-1. Dave LaPoint, one of the pitchers Milwaukee had traded to St. Louis in the Fingers/Simmons deal, was cruising along. He was into the seventh, got one out, and induced Ben Ogilvie to hit an easy ground ball to first base. And then, the roof fell on in the Cardinals.

LaPoint was covering first base on the grounder and simply dropped the ball. It was followed by a single from Don Money. With two outs, Gantner doubled to score one run. LaPoint came out and righty Doug Bair came in. He walked Molitor to load the bases, and Yount singled in two runs to cut the lead to 5-4. Runners were on first and third and Cardinal manager Whitey Herzog summoned Kaat to stop the bleeding. He couldn't. Cooper singled to tie the game.

With runners on first and second, a wild pitch prompted Herzog to make another pitching change, this one in mid-batter. After an intentional walk to Simmons, Thomas—whose pop-out had started this inning—completed the rally with a two-run single to make it 7-5.

It was a stunning turn of events and the Brewer bullpen made it stand up. Jim Slaton worked two clean innings and McClure retired the last five batters to tie the World Series at two games apiece.

Caldwell and Forsch rematched their Game 1 meeting and this one was a much better game. The Brewers still got to Forsch quickly though. With one out in the first, consecutive singles from Yount and Cooper singled, an error on a pickoff throw moved both runners up. Simmons grounded out, but picked up the run and it was 1-0.

St. Louis finally solved Caldwell for a run in the third, when David Green—another player moved in the big trade between the teams—tripled and scored on a Hernandez double. Milwaukee immediately answered when Molitor walked, Yount doubled and Cooper picked up the run with a productive out.

Molitor was again in the middle of a rally in the bottom of the fifth. After Moore had doubled to start the inning, Molitor drove him in with a base hit. Caldwell wasn't nearly as dominant as Game 1—he gave up 14 hits in this game—but the lefty was finding ways to work himself out of trouble and the game went to the seventh still 3-1.

The Smiths—Ozzie and Lonnie—started the top of the seventh with a walk and a single. With two outs, a Hendrick base hit cut the lead to 3-2. Yount promptly answered in the bottom of the frame with an opposite-field home run for a 4-2 lead. The Brewers added two more runs in the eighth. With runners on first and second, Moore and Gantner hit consecutive RBI singles and the cushion was 6-2.

Cushion was needed, because the Cardinals rallied in the ninth. Green and Hernandez hit successive one-out doubles, Hendrick singled and it was 6-4, chasing Caldwell and bringing in McClure. Porter singled. The lead run was at the plate in the person of McGee. McClure got him with a strikeout. Gene Tenace then hit the ball hard to left field, but it was an out and Milwaukee was now back in control of the World Series.

Sutton would get the chance to close out a title when the Series went back to St. Louis for the back end. But the future Hall of Famer just didn't have it in Game 6. In the second inning, doubles by Iorg and Herr were sandwiched around a Yount error and the result was two St. Louis runs. In the fourth, Hernandez singled, Porter homered, then Hernandez tripled and scored. It was 5-0 and the rout was on.

Stuper threw a four-hitter. Hernandez hit a two-run homer in the fifth and the Brewers fell completely apart in the sixth, as the Cardinals used five hits, two wild pitches and a walk to score six runs. Milwaukee avoided the shutout in the ninth, but that was their only bright spot in a 13-1 win for St. Louis.

Vuckovich and Andujar were on the mound, each with normal rest for Game 7. Once again, they both pitched well early and it was scoreless in the fourth when St. Louis picked up a run. McGee and Herr started the inning with singles, and then on an infield hit, McGee scored all the way from second.

After St. Louis manufactured a run, Milwaukee answered with one swing in the top of the fifth—Ogilvie homered to right. In the sixth, the Brewers took the lead. Gantner doubled, then Molitor laid down a bunt. Andujar came off the mound and fired an errant throw to first. It scored the lead run and put Molitor on second base, where he was able to score on a Yount infield hit and Cooper sac fly.

Trailing 3-1, the Cardinals came right back at Vuckovich in the bottom of the inning. With one out, the Smiths got it going. Ozzie singled and Lonnie doubled, setting up second and third. McClure was brought in for Vuckovich. A walk to Tenance loaded the bases, then successive singles from Hernandez and Hendrick made it 4-3.

Andujar gave way to Sutter in the eighth, and the Brewers couldn't touch the St. Louis closer. The Cards still got two more runs in the bottom of the eighth, removing any drama from the ninth and Sutter closed out the 6-3 win and the World Series title for St. Louis.

Porter was named Series MVP. The nicest thing I can say about this is that it's one of the most poorly considered MVP votes in Series history. He had a notable night in Game 2, but for the Series he only hit .286 with an on-base percentage of .310. A far better choice would be Andujar, who beat the AL Cy Young Award winner twice, including in Game 7, and only gave up two runs in 13 innings of work.

The notable performers for Milwaukee were Molitor and Yount, who hit .355 and .414 respectively, along with Caldwell, who had the two wins and a 2.04 ERA and was only two outs short of a pair of complete games.

It was a crushing loss, but the response of the Brewer fans was nothing short of amazing. When the team plane landed at Milwaukee's Mitchell Field Airport, there were throngs greeting them. Players were stunned--the crowd couldn't have been any louder had they won. The same was true for the rally the following day--a packed crowd at County Stadium celebrated the team and the season. Yount rode his motorcycle around the warning track. It was an outpouring of love for a beloved team.

1983

For five solid months they Brewers made a run at finishing the job, but a September fade portended a finishing of a different kind—the completion of the greatest era in franchise history.

Yount followed his MVP year of 1982 with another excellent all-around season, finishing with a .383 on-base percentage and .503 slugging percentage. Molitor saw his numbers dip somewhat, but still had a .333 OBP and swiped 41 bases.

Cooper was as good as ever at first base, hitting 30 home runs and driving in 126 runs. Ted

Simmons had 108 RBI. But both were 33-years-old, which was one problem the Brewers faced—outside of Molitor and Yount, this was becoming an old team. And the supporting cast dipped noticeably in 1983.

Oglivie was productive when he played—.371 OBP/.463 slugging, but a substantial amount of missed time kept him to 13 home runs. There was no production at the DH spot. Gantner had an off-year. Moore had a decent .354 OBP in right field, although his power dipped.

The biggest change came in centerfield though. Since this franchise started its rise to prominence back in 1978, Gorman Thomas was in center. Gorman was one of the best home run hitters in the game and had further renown for crashing into fences defensively. His range was—to be kind—rather limited—and he wasn't above striking out a lot. What he was, was colorful and a hero to the blue-collar fan base. But the first two months of the year went poorly for him and on June 6 he was traded.

Thomas was the key piece moved in a deal with Cleveland to get Rick Manning, who was the precise opposite. Manning didn't hit, but excelled defensively. And his defensive excellence was such that he rarely needed to crash into a fence. He simply ran balls down. He was a good ballplayer, but he was never going to captivate a community like Gorman did. In pure baseball terms, this was not a huge trade—Gorman only had one more good year left in the majors. But it marked a recognition by Milwaukee that they needed to get younger in a hurry.

A rematch of the 1982 ALCS with the Angels opened the season and the Brewers lost two of three. They were able to answer by sweeping a two-game set with the White Sox, who would supplant the Angels at the top of the AL West.

The AL East collectively didn't start out well and the Brewers were a part of that. Milwaukee was .500 on Memorial Day, but amidst a group of six teams packed within three games of first place. The early part of the summer was more of the same. After the Thomas trade, Milwaukee went into a swoon where they lost 11 of 15 against the Orioles, Yankees and Tigers. But the Brewers took advantage of seven games with division also-ran Cleveland, went 6-1 and were still 38-37 at the All-Star break.

None of the other traditional AL East powers had gotten traction. Baltimore was also muddling along. New York and Boston were in the mix, but were a far cry from their great teams of the late 1970s. Detroit was on the rise, but not yet a cut above anyone else. It was Toronto, who had never been a factor since their existence began in 1977 that was setting the pace. The Brewers, 4 ½ games out, were one of five teams in pursuit of the surprising Blue Jays.

The Milwaukee veterans heated up in July and August. They won 15 of 22 against AL West teams. On August 10, behind a shutout from Haas in Kansas City, they pulled even. Over the next fifteen days, the Brewers were anywhere from a game up in the AL East to a game behind. Simmons won two consecutive games against the fading Red Sox with walkoff RBIs.

A nine-game road trip to the West Coast didn't go well, with six losses and surging Baltimore began to get some separation, as Toronto faded and Boston collapsed. But with Labor Day signaling the arrival of the stretch drive, the Brewers were still within five games. They were squarely in the middle of a pennant race with the Orioles, Yankees and Tigers. And they had fifteen games coming up against those three teams.

It was an ideal team for a veteran team to assert themselves and Milwaukee started by taking the first two of a four-game home set with New York. It was the last high point of this franchise's six-year run. The Brewers won only one more game in the rest of this stretch. Showing that fate can be cruel, they were swept four straight in Baltimore to finish it off—the same four-game sweep the Orioles had needed to end 1982, but couldn't get.

Milwaukee still ended the season at 87-75. In the rugged AL East, that was only good for fifth place, eleven games off the pace.

Kuenn stepped down in what looked like a mutual agreement between club and skipper that the time had come. There were no illusions in Milwaukee and it was understood that an era had ended, although it's safe to say that no one expected the complete collapse in 1984 when the Brewers were one of the worst teams in baseball.

Winning baseball returned to Milwaukee in reasonably short order—by 1987, when they began another six-year run of having decent teams. But those teams were no match for what 1978-83 had given the people of Wisconsin. Those teams were not only good, they were colorful and fun and have a special place in the heart of a home region that normally reserves such affection for the Green Bay Packers. That era ended in 1983.

