



## **BOSTON'S AGONY**

### **The Red Sox From 1968-80**

*When They Mastered The Near-Miss  
& Shaped A Generation Of Red Sox Fans*

The culture of the Boston Red Sox changed starting with the 1968 season. The franchise was coming off a miracle pennant run—The Impossible Dream year of 1967. When those Red Sox fell just short of winning the World Series there were no recriminations and no talk of a jinx. It was through the ensuing decade, through the repeated frustrations of the 1970s Boston Red Sox, that the dynamic changed.

Boston produced consistently good teams throughout the decade, the best sustained stretch of baseball New England had seen since the days when Babe Ruth still wore a Red Sox uniform. But they never won a World Series title and with the innocence of '67 in the rearview mirror, it wasn't good enough.

With each ensuing heartbreak the demands for the franchise to take the final step escalated, as did the willingness of pundits to come up with bizarre reasons for the failure to do so. The culture of Red Sox Nation that many of us grew up knowing and some us grew into loving—the futile pursuit of a title—was born.

*Boston's Agony* looks at each season in this era of 1968-80, The Heartbreak Decade of Boston Red Sox history. You'll read about the following...

\*How Boston came off the 1967 pennant and established that they were no one-year wonder, continuing to play winning baseball, even if they were off the pace of the league's elite. Those first four post-Impossible Dream years paved the way for the heartbreak of 1972 and the utter collapse of 1974.

\*The long-awaited return to postseason play in 1975, from winning the AL East with room to spare, to ending MLB's great dynasty of the early 1970s to a heroic battle in the World Series that came up just one run short.

\*Injury-riddle disappointment in 1976 and losing a tough AL East race in 1977 set the stage for the worst heartbreak of all—blowing a big division lead against the Yankees and losing an epic one-game playoff in Fenway Park to end 1978.

\*The gradual fade of 1979 and 1980. The Red Sox were still a winning team in those years, but it was apparent the window on winning a World Series had closed.

Each of the following pieces is published on TheSportsNotebook.com and has been edited for this compilation to create a cohesive narrative about the Boston Red Sox of the 1970s. Read about all the key players and the biggest games—regular season and playoffs—that raised fans' hopes and ultimately left them dashed.

## 1968

The 1968 Boston Red Sox were a team coming off one of the most magical years in franchise history. After a decade of truly awful baseball and declining fan interest, the Red Sox won an improbable American League pennant in 1967 under first-year manager Dick Williams, buoyed by a Triple Crown year from Carl Yastrzemski. The Red Sox didn't follow it up with another pennant in '68, but they at least demonstrated that the winning baseball of "The Impossible Dream Year" was no fluke.

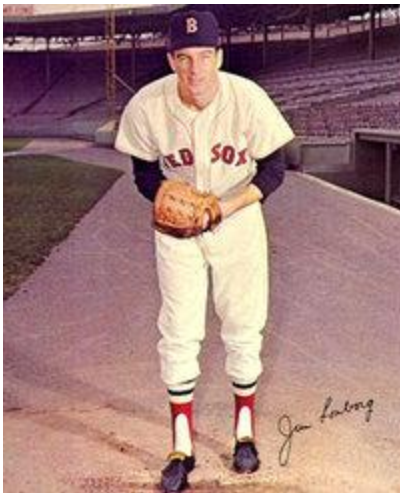
Boston was carried by its bats, which ranked second in the 10-team American League in runs scored, and were in the top three in each key individual category. Yastrzemski hit .301 with 23 home runs in the left field spot. Before thinking that those numbers look low for a star, 1968 was renowned for being a pitching-dominated season and Yaz won the batting title at .301. The mound would be lowered a year later to improve vision for the hitters.

Reggie Smith was a talented 23-year-old centerfielder who finished with a .342 on-base percentage and .430 slugging percentage. He also stole 22 bases, the one speed threat in the Boston lineup. Ken "Hawk" Harrelson had excellent power in rightfield, hitting 35 home runs, slugging .518 and leading the league with 109 RBI.

Mike Andrews, a favorite of the manager, was a good young second baseman and finished with a .368 OBP. Joe Foy was another infielder with a good batting eye and the third baseman had a .336 OBP in spite of only batting .225. George Scott at first base and Rico Petrocelli hadn't yet really emerged, but both were young offensive threats in the making.

In short, the Red Sox were young—everyone in the starting lineup was under the age of 30. All they needed was some pitching.

Unfortunately, in this pitching rich year, that was in short supply. The ERA numbers look good from our perspective today. Ray Culp was at 2.91, Gary Bell posted a 3.12, Dick Ellsworth came in at 3.03. These three were the steady horses of the rotation. But collectively, the Red Sox staff was eighth-best in the American League. By the standard of the times, they weren't up to snuff.



The problem was Jim Lonborg. The 26-year-old had been right behind Yaz as the hero of the Impossible Dream team, but on Christmas Eve of 1967, he and all of Red Sox nation got coal in their stocking—Lonborg tore up his knee in a skiing accident.

Lonborg made only 17 starts and finished with a 4.29 ERA, intolerably high by 1968 norms. Lonborg in fact would never be the same and would not even become a reliable rotation member—much less an ace—until he joined up with the excellent Philadelphia Phillies teams in the latter half of the 1970s.

There were still some good young pitchers—Jose Santiago made 18 starts and finished with a 2.25 ERA. Sparky Lyle, a tobacco-chewing 23-year-old, finished with a 2.74 ERA. Lyle should have gotten more work, but mediocre Lee Stange and Gary Waslewski handled most of the important bullpen innings.

Everything started well on Opening Day against the Detroit Tigers. Yaz, Smith and Petrocelli each had two hits, the latter drove in three runs and the Sox won 7-3. The team won seven of their first eleven games, but then dropped eight of ten and slipped five games back at the start of May.

The bright spot in the early season was winning five of seven against the Yankees, even if the Pinstripes were a far cry from the power that had once been or would be again. Boston muddled along at .500 into Memorial Day, 4 1/2 games out and in fifth place in a league that was in its last year without divisional splits and where the winner advanced directly to the World Series.

The Red Sox then dropped nine of their next 15, including a 2-3 record against the Tigers, who were emerging as the new team to beat. Boston was below .500 as late as July 2, but won eight in a row to go into the All-Star break with a record of 43-38. The problem was that they were eleven games back, in fourth place and time was running short.

Nor did the Sox turn it on in the second half, splitting their first 24 games out of the break. But the Tigers didn't bury them, and when the calendar flipped to August, Boston was sitting ten games out, clinging for life. An 8-1 stretch was paralleled by a hot streak for Detroit and when the two teams met in Motown, Boston trailed by nine games. The four-game series at Tiger Stadium was their last stand and they needed a minimum of three victories.

On Friday, August 9, it looked like a little magic might stir again. Boston trailed 2-1 in the eighth inning, with a man on and nobody out. Yaz doubled to tie the game. The Red Sox got the bases loaded and Foy hit a grand slam to get the win.

Saturday's game was tied 1-1 in the fifth, when backup catcher Dalton Jones doubled to give Boston the lead. Harrelson later added another run with a sac fly to make it 3-1. But the Tigers tied the game and then Norm Cash won it with a solo shot in the eighth. Boston now realistically needed to sweep Sunday's doubleheader.

The twinbill got off to a good start. Andrews drew a leadoff walk to start the first game and Jones homered. Harrelson singled, Foy homered and it was 4-0 before anyone was settled into their seats. But the Boston bats shut down and Lonborg, a chance to redeem a disappointing season, started getting chipped away at after five strong frames. Trailing 4-1, Detroit got single runs in the sixth, seventh and eighth and the game went extra innings.

Mickey Lolich would be a World Series for Detroit in October and he came on in relief today. Lyle matched him, going 5 2/3 innings overall and the game stretched to the 14th inning. Stange finally came on and gave up a two-out home run.

The 5-4 loss was close to a death blow for the Sox' pennant hopes, but salt was added to the wound in the nightcap. With the score tied 2-2 in the ninth, Reggie Smith homered and two more seeming insurance runs were added. Then four different Red Sox relievers combined to give up a walk and five singles, and the Tigers got four runs of their own to win 6-5.

Boston would muddle along to an 11-10 record the rest of August and then go 13-12 in September. They closed the season at 86-76, a distant 22 1/2 games back in fourth place. If nothing else, the heartbreak of Detroit in August ended up not mattering.

Whenever a team goes from almost winning the World Series to failing to do so, it always seems like a disappointment, but there's one development that I'm confident no one noticed at the time, because similar stories in our own day get ignored. That development is this—Boston had clearly established that the turnaround of 1967 was not a one-year wonder.

They might not be World Series-caliber on a sustained basis, but they were now indisputably a franchise that won more games than they lost. It started a trend, that with only a handful of exceptions has lived on to this day. A new era was underway.

## 1969

The game changed significantly in 1969—expansion split the leagues into two divisions, East & West with a League Championship Series round instituted prior to the World Series. The pitching mound was lowered to enable an increase in offense. But amidst the changes the Red Sox remained essentially the same, winning 87 games with a team strong on offense and struggling with pitching.

The 29-year-old Yaz anchored left field, hitting 40 home runs and driving in 111 runs. Reggie Smith finished with an on-base percentage of .368 and a slugging percentage of .527. Harrelson opened the season as the rightfielder, having led the team in RBI in 1968.

Petrocelli added to the production with a breakout year. He hit a career-high 40 home runs, finished with a .403 on-base percentage, had 97 RBI and scored 92 runs. 1969 was the best year of a pretty solid career and Petrocelli finished seventh in the MVP voting.

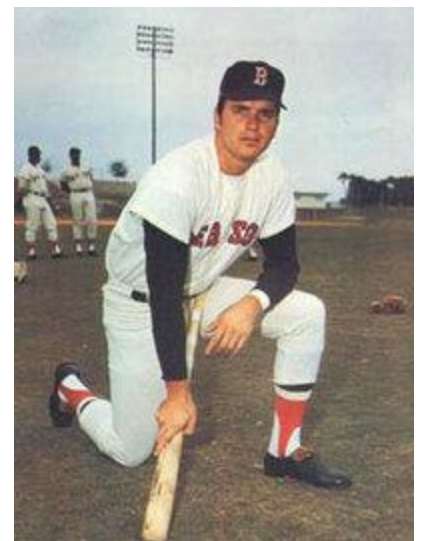
Petrocelli's middle infield partner Mike Andrews, continued to be a solid presence, with a .390 OBP and some surprising pop, with 15 home runs. George Scott continued to grow into an offensive threat, hitting 16 home runs at third base.

But the big story of the season was the return of Tony Conigliaro.

“Tony C” was one of the bright young stars in baseball in 1967 when he suffered a terrible beaming in August of that pennant-drive year. This was before batting helmets had a flap on the side facing the pitcher and it shattered his eyebones.

Congliario missed all of 1968 in recovery. His return in 1969 saw him start to come back. The numbers weren't spectacular—a .321 OBP and .427 slugging. But even being on the field was a miracle and to produce at even this respectable level was an amazing testament to Congliario's courage and persistence.

The pitching staff continued to be a problem. Ray Culp was reliable, winning 17 games and consistently taking his turn. But Culp wasn't cut out to be an ace and Jim Lonborg's second straight subpar year continued to plague the staff.



An ill-advised trade early in the season didn't help. Boston dealt away Dick Ellsworth to the Cleveland Indians. To make matters worse, the focal point of the deal was Harrelson. In return, the Red Sox got 32-year-old starting pitcher Sonny Siebert, basically indistinguishable from Ellsworth and reliever Vincente Romo, a reliever who finished with a 3.18 ERA.

Thus, what it boiled down to is that the Red Sox traded away one of their most productive bats for an above-average reliever while making no discernible improvement in the starting pitching.

Boston still started the season strong. They went 26-14 going into Memorial Day and were right on the heels of the red-hot Baltimore Orioles. The Birds were the only team the Red Sox couldn't beat in the early days—a three-game series saw Boston pitching give up thirty runs to Baltimore. Even so, the Red Sox closed the month of May on an 18-6 run and were right in the thick of the first-ever AL East race.

It was the middle of June when Boston stumbled and it came at a point in the schedule that should have been ripe for them to make up ground. They played 11 of 15 games at home and the opponents were the Oakland A's, Cleveland Indians and New York Yankees. Only the A's were a good team. Yet the Red Sox lost nine of the fifteen games and were suddenly nine games back of an Oriole team that just kept on rolling.

The margin widened to 13 1/2 games, but Boston would play Baltimore eight times in the final week and a half before the All-Star break. It was an imposing task, but if the Red Sox could win six games, they'd at least put the deficit back into single digits by the break.

Baltimore's Memorial Stadium—the house on 33rd Street—as it was called by the locals—was the venue for the first five games. The opener was tied 4-4 in the bottom of the ninth, but Romo—acquired at such great cost—surrendered a walk, a stolen base and an opposite field single to Frank Robinson that ended it.

The Red Sox stiffened their spine for Friday's doubleheader. The opener was tied 3-3 in the seventh, when Yaz homered to get the lead and Smith drilled a three-run shot in the eighth to put away a 7-4 win. Andrews was the hero of the nightcap, going 5-for-5 in the leadoff spot and the Sox coasted to a 12-3 rout.

Conigliaro came out on Saturday against Baltimore's Mike Cuellar and got three hits. Tony C was the only one in the lineup that got a hit though, and Cuellar spun a 4-0 shutout. In a virtual must-win game on Sunday, Lonborg couldn't get out of the second and the Red Sox had lost three of five in a series they needed to dominate.

The three-game set to close the first half went better, as Andrews hit a first-inning home run to lead a 6-1 win in Friday's opener. On Saturday, Yaz hit a game-tying home run in the sixth to make the score 3-3 and then first baseman/backup catcher Dalton Jones hit a two-out, two-run double in the seventh for the run that stood up.

In Sunday's finale, the Sox were leading 3-2 when Boston backup infielder Syd O'Brien ripped a two-run triple. Lonborg, on in relief in the era prior to the DH, hit a sacrifice fly. That run was necessary, because Longborg nearly gave it all back in the ninth, being charged with three runs. Sparky Lyle came out of the bullpen to get Brooks Robinson and close the 6-5 win.

Boston had won five of the eight games with Baltimore, although with the margin still at 12 1/2 , it smacked of too-little too-late. And that proved to be accurate.

The Red Sox did not win another series until the middle of August, by which point the deficit was 21 games. And the Orioles were off and running to a 109-win season, so no one was going to catch them in any case.

Unfortunately, this was also the year the Dick Williams era came to an end. In spite of turning the franchise around immediately, Williams' prickly personality got him canned with nine games to go. Boston ended up in third place.

The Red Sox continued to be good without Williams, steadily producing winning seasons. But Williams did even better for himself—he went to Oakland and led a team that would be the great dynasty of the 1970s.

## 1970

Eddie Kasko was the new manager and for better and for worse, Boston was a team that produced the same results. For the third straight year, the Red Sox were a winning team that could score runs. They were also a team with pitching problems that ended up light-years behind the best in the AL East.

Yastrzemski turned 30 and moved from left field to first base, but it didn't slow down his bat. Yaz ripped 40 home runs for the second straight year, and cleared the century mark in both RBI and runs scored. Petrocelli didn't hit forty home runs as he had in '69, but the 27-year-old shortstop still hit 29 home runs and finished with 103 RBI.



Reggie Smith was only 25 years old, but the centerfielder was already established as one of the game's bright young stars. The 1970 MLB season furthered that, as Smith finished with an on-base percentage of .361 and a slugging percentage of .497.

George Scott had a breakout year at third base, finishing with numbers of .355/.467, while second baseman Andrews continued to be a solid sparkplug, with a .344 OBP.

One year earlier, Tony C had inspired everyone with his comeback from a terrible beaming in August of 1967. In 1970, Conigliario took it to the next level and had a big year—his 116 RBI were second in the American League and he hit 36 home runs.

And the outfield was a family affair for the Red Sox—while Tony played right, his 22-year-old brother Billy was in left and posted a .339 OBP/.462 slugging.

It added up to an offense that finished second in the American League in runs scored. The problem was that the pitching ranked eighth out of what was then a twelve-team league in ERA.

No major part of the staff finished with an ERA under 3.00. Culp came the closest, at 3.04 in over 250 innings pitched, as he won 17 games. Siebert clocked in at 3.44 in 222 innings of work. Gary Peters took his turn reliably, logging over 220 innings, but ended up at 4.06. Mike Nagy, a 22-year-old arm that had shown promise in 1969 in limited work, ended up at 4.48 in his twenty starts.

Lonborg continued to struggle with both health and effectiveness. He only went to the post four times in 1970. And the only reliever with any consistency at all was Sparky Lyle, who saved 20



games, but even here the ERA was pretty high at 3.88.

The Red Sox struggled in the early going, the lowlight being a 2-7 road trip at Milwaukee, Oakland and the California Angels, with the A's being the only good team in that group. Then, with a record of 16-19, the Sox lost three of four to front-running Baltimore. Boston reached Memorial Day with a record 17-22 and were 10 1/2 back of the Orioles.

Just after the holiday weekend, before May was out, the Sox turned it around with a 7-1 stretch at Fenway Park. It got them to .500, though they didn't clear the mark for good until July when a six-game home win streak over losing teams in the Cleveland Indians and Washington Senators pushed them into winning territory. By the All-Star break, the Red Sox were 44-41, and hanging around in the AL East race, within nine games of the Orioles.

Ultimately though, the Red Sox couldn't beat the AL East front-runner head-to-head. They lost 13 of 18 games against the Orioles, and by Labor Day, Boston was in a 17 1/2 game hole with a record of 71-67.

The flip side was that at least they could handle Cleveland and Washington, going 12-6 against both teams. The Red Sox closed the year by winning 10 of 12 games, most against the Indians and Senators and finished with a mark of 87-75, good for third place in the AL East.

## 1971

The pattern continued in 1971. The Red Sox scored runs and won more than they lost. They struggled with pitching, couldn't get out of the eighties for wins and finished well off the pace.

Boston's front office, which had already made a poor deal to get rid of Harrelson in 1970, followed it up with another ill-advised move prior to the start of the 1971 MLB season. They traded Tony Conigliaro.

What did the Sox get for him? The highlight of the package was a light-hitting second baseman in Doug Griffin.

To make matters worse, Boston already had a good second baseman in Mike Andrews, whom they shipped out to the Chicago White Sox in exchange for the aging Luis Aparacio, a great player in his day and still outstanding with the glove. But Aparacio was now 37 and his offensive production was non-existent.

The situation got worse when you consider that George Scott regressed, after appearing to come into his own in 1970. And finally, the great Carl Yastrzemski, had a one-year loss of power, only slugging .392 even as he got on base to the tune of a .381 OBP.

So how did the Red Sox still manage to rank third in the 12-team American League in runs scored? Petrocelli might have changed positions, going from short to third to accommodate Aparacio, but Petrocelli's bat didn't lose its punch. He posted a .354 OBP and slugged .461. Reggie Smith had numbers of .352/.489.

Two other players chipped in, with rightfielder Joe Lahoud, who replaced Conigliaro, had a .330/.438 stat line—it didn't match "Tony C", but it was pretty good. And Tony's younger brother Billy stayed with the team and popped 11 home runs in a reserve role, while slugging .436.

Boston's top two starting pitchers, Culp and Siebert, each significantly improved their ERAs, bringing them down to 2.42 and 2.91 respectively. But pitching improved across the league and it wasn't enough to prevent Boston from still ranking 10th in the AL in ERA.

Peters struggled to a 4.37 ERA, though he did win 14 games. Lonborg made 26 starts with a pedestrian ERA of 4.13. The good news came in the bullpen, where Sparky Lyle put up a 2.75 ERA and saved 16 games, a decent number at a time when saves weren't nearly as common as they are today.

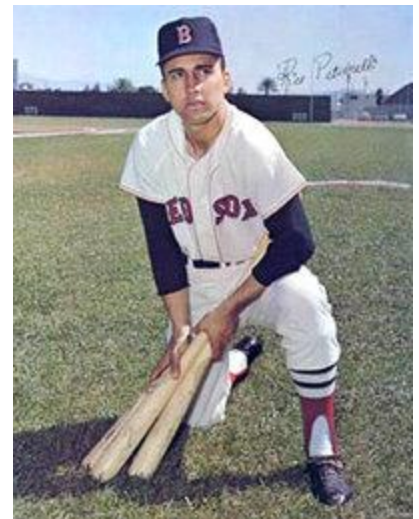
The Red Sox played nine of their first ten games on the road and managed a 5-5 split. Then they got rolling and won 10 of 13 games at Fenway Park and moved into first place by the beginning of May. They went on the road and continued to play well, going 5-2. A pair of three-game series with the two-time defending AL East champion Baltimore Orioles was survived, as the teams split and the Sox swept a total of four games from the contending Detroit Tigers and the New York Yankees.

By Memorial Day, the Red Sox were 29-16, and in first place. They led the Orioles by 2 1/2 games and the Tigers by four.

After previous years, which had seen Boston fall substantially behind Baltimore in the first half of the season, it was at least heartening not to be giving chase by June. But it didn't take long for the slump to come.

It was the Kansas City Royals, who would finish second in the AL West, that were the thorn in the side and they came into Boston and swept the Sox. When Boston made the return trip to the heartland two weeks later, the Royals swept them again. In between the two sweeps, the Red Sox went 3-10. When it was all over, they were five games back of the Orioles.

But the Sox came off the canvas. Baltimore came to Fenway for a four-game set and Boston grabbed three wins, triggering a 12-3 stretch that got them to within 2 1/2 games. But they took the foot off the gas just prior to the All-Star break, losing three straight in the Bronx. The Red Sox were 5 1/2 back at the midpoint.



The second half of the schedule started pretty well, with a 6-2 stretch against bad teams in the Minnesota Twins, Milwaukee Brewers and the White Sox, and Boston closed to within 3 1/2 games. For the first time since 1967, the Red Sox were in legitimate contention for first place this late in the season.

In late July, a bad four-game series in Milwaukee, losing three, was an ominous foreshadowing. The killer blow came from August 5-18. The entire two-week stretch was at Fenway, yet the Red Sox went 4-11, falling to the Tigers, the future AL West champion Oakland A's, the Royals (of course) and the Angels. By the time the carnage was over, the deficit in the AL East was 10 1/2 games and pennant fever in the Fens was history.

Boston went 15-13 in the month of September, and still won 85 games. You only needed to turn the clock back five years to know times much worse than this. But after four years of finishing way in the rearview mirror of the leaders--the Sox ended 18 games behind Baltimore--it was time to do a little bit more. Fortunately, real, season-long pennant contention awaited Red Sox Nation the very next season.

## 1972

The Red Sox made only marginal improvements on the field in 1972, but that was combined with the best teams in the AL East coming back to the pack. It added up to pennant race baseball in Fenway Park.

Labor strife overshadowed the 1972 MLB season. Consequently, the regular season didn't begin until mid-April. The powers-that-be also decided to simply pick up the schedule where it was and to allow teams to play differing numbers of games based on what was remaining. It was a stupid decision that would loom large before it was over.

The Red Sox' basic formula of 1968-71 remained in place for this season—that formula could be crudely described as hit the heck out of the ball to make up for bad pitching. Boston led the American League in runs scored, and finished 11th in ERA.

A big trade with the Milwaukee Brewers had aimed at strengthening the pitching rotation. The Sox parted with Billy Conigliaro, Joe Lahoud and most notably George Scott, as the key pieces used to acquire Marty Pattin for the top of the rotation. Pattin was decent, winning 17 games with a 3.24 ERA. The deal also got Tommy Harper, a base-stealing centerfielder.

The trade wasn't a difference-maker, but it worked out pretty well for Boston. Another deal with the New York Yankees was a difference-marker and it was a disaster. The Red Sox traded their Sparky Lyle for first baseman Danny Cater.

Lyle became a cornerstone of a bullpen that won three straight American League pennants

(1976-78), two straight World Series and he grabbed a Cy Young Award in 1977. Cater batted .237 and hit eight home runs. Nor did it ever get any better.



Sparky Lyle-for-Danny Cater was, plain and simply, the second-worst transaction the Boston Red Sox ever consummated with the New York Yankees.

Other offensive players picked up the slack. Reggie Smith moved from center to right to make room for Harper, but continued to put up numbers, with a .365 on-base percentage/.475 slugging percentage. Boston called up a 24-year-old catcher named Carlton Fisk, who posted numbers of .370/.538, while popping 22 home runs and bringing a fiery emotional spark to the team.

Harper brought the spark of speed, swiping 25 bases and finishing with a .341 OBP. Yaz and Petrocelli both struggled with power, but Yaz finished with a .357 OBP, while Petrocelli was in at .339. Aparacio at short wasn't an offensive threat, but the 38-year-old glove wizard stabilized the defense.

Behind Pattin, the rest of the rotation was functionable, if not great. Siebert and John Curtis each finished with ERAs in the high 3s. Culp declined sharply though and was released after the '72 season was over. It was the Lyle-less bullpen that was the big problem.

If nothing else, Boston did settle on the two pitchers that would eventually help this team win the 1975 American League pennant. Bill Lee got the first regular work of his career, throwing 84 innings and finishing with a 3.20 ERA. And Luis Tiant revived his career, making 19 starts, 24 more relief appearances and winning 15 games with a dazzling 1.91 ERA.

The season didn't begin well, and the Red Sox started 9-17 and fell 7 ½ games out before reviving themselves with a 5-2 homestand against the Brewers and the three-time defending AL champion Baltimore Orioles. But the revival didn't last and on June 26, Boston was still 25-33 and eight games off the pace in the AL East. Having just gone 8-14 in a stretch against mostly sub-.500 teams from the AL West, there was no reason for New England to expect a contender.

Finally, Boston got it going. They won seven in a row and eventually nudged their way to .500. Leading up to the break, they swept the California Angels at home and then got set for a strange six-game series against the Oakland A's, with two doubleheaders scheduled in a three-day span.

The A's would eventually win the World Series, but the Red Sox were able to grab four wins in the six games. Boston was 45-41 at the late July 23 All-Star break, and within five games of the Detroit Tigers.

Regression started the second half, with three losses in four games at New York, then a series loss in Detroit, followed by dropping the first two games of a four-game home series with the Yankees. The Sox were again under .500, at 47-48 and 6 ½ games out.

Their back getting increasingly close to the wall, Boston won the last two against New York, then took a series from Baltimore. They crawled to 59-56 and then won six of eight to close August.

By the time Labor Day arrived, the AL East race was red-hot. Baltimore was in first, but Boston, New York and Detroit were all within a half-game of the lead. The stage was set for a dramatic September.

Curtis stepped up, with a shutout of the Yankees to conclude a three-game sweep in Fenway. Curtis then punctuated a strong week by shutting out Cleveland on Sunday, September 9.

Boston now had a game and a half lead. They split six games the following week and Detroit pulled into a tie, with Baltimore and New York still in close pursuit.

A big series win over the Orioles was followed by splitting four with the Tigers. With a week to play, the race was narrowing to the Red Sox and Tigers. The Orioles and Yankees were 2 ½ games out and three back respectively.

The Red Sox and Tigers were scheduled to play three in Detroit to conclude the regular season, so the chances for Baltimore and New York to make up ground were drastically limited. By the time the final games arrived, it was down to Boston and Detroit. The Red Sox were 84-68 and the Tigers were 84-69. It was a de facto best-of-three for the AL East title.

Luis Aparacio is the name that lives on in Red Sox lore for the Monday opener. The scenario was this—Boston trailed 1-0 in the top of the third and Harper and Aparacio both singled, setting up first and third with one out. Yaz then lashed a double to center. Aparacio was coming around third to score when he slipped and fell. He ran back to third safely, but Yaz, aiming for a triple and unable to reverse course, was thrown out at third.

The inning ended with only Harper's run, and the "Aparacio slipped rounding third" took its place in The Litany of Red Sox Woe somewhere right after "The ground ball went through Buckner's legs" and "Grady didn't take out Pedro".

But this overstates the case. The fact of the matter is that the top of the third was the only inning in two days where the Boston offense looked alive. Curtis pitched reasonably well on Monday, but Mickey Lolich was even better for Detroit, winning 4-1. The Red Sox then lost on Tuesday 2-1, mustering only four hits in the process. It's highly debatable if Boston even wins Monday's game if Aparacio hadn't slipped, much less won the pennant.

Boston did win Wednesday and finished within a ½ game. Red Sox historians should focus more on the stupidity of baseball not making some kind of provision for this sort of ending and at least ensuring that a division title would not be settled by an uneven number of games played.

I understand that Detroit surely played Wednesday differently knowing it was clinched, but it hardly seems unreasonable to suggest that a basic premise of a pennant race should be each team playing the same number of games. Boston should have been able to play a game with a canceled opponent from early April to try and tie for first and force a one-game playoff.

In any case, the Red Sox at least returned to serious pennant contention in 1972 and they identified Tiant and Lee, the arms that would eventually put them back in the postseason.

## 1973

Kasko managed in Boston for four years and turned out a winning team every year. His best team was the 1973 Boston Red Sox, who won 89 games. But they were also his last team, as the problem of continuing to finish well behind the Baltimore Orioles led to a managerial change at year's end.



Improved pitching was the reason the '73 Red Sox won a few more games than their immediate predecessors. Tiant and Lee became rotation regulars for the first time. Each pitched over 270 innings and they combined for 37 wins.

1973 was also the first time in the Kasko regime that Boston had four regular starters pitching over 200 innings. Curtis and Pattin combined for 28 more wins and consistently took their turn. The bullpen didn't have

depth, but versatile Roger Moret made 15 relief appearances, 15 starts and went 13-2 with a 3.17 ERA.



The result was that after spending the previous seasons in the lower echelons of the American League in staff ERA, Boston ranked fifth in pitching for the 1973 MLB season.

Offensively, the Red Sox slipped a bit, but still were the fourth-best in the AL at scoring runs. Reggie Smith finished with a .398 on-base percentage/.515 slugging percentage, both in the top four of the league. Yastrzemski, now 33-years-old, found a power stroke that had been missing for a couple years and slugged .463. He also finished with a .407 OBP and drove in 95 runs.

Harper stole 54 bases and set a club record that would stand until Jacoby Ellsbury arrived in Fenway. Fisk didn't match the production of his great 1972 rookie year, but still hit 26 home runs

and was a leader behind the plate.

A decline in production from Petrocelli at third was made up for by a good year from Orlando Cepeda, the first Red Sox player to take advantage of the newly-instituted designated hitter rule. Cepeda finished with a .350 OBP and hit 20 home runs.

Boston opened the season by sweeping the Yankees three straight in Fenway. The Sox scored 25 runs the first two games, and then won the finale when Cepeda hit a walkoff home run against old friend Sparky Lyle. The two rivals then went to New York for two games that they split and Boston was off to a 4-1 start.

The Red Sox took a turn for the worse, when they lost four straight at home to the Detroit Tigers. Boston pitching gave up 33 runs in the four games. When the Sox made a mid-May return trip to Detroit, the result was three more losses. Boston straggled into Memorial Day with a record of 18-21, though with the Tigers the only AL East team over .500—and not by much—the Red Sox were still just three games off the pace.

Boston continued to slog along through June. It was a five-game series in the Bronx in early July, where the Sox won four games, that got them on the move. They cleared .500 for good and it started a 12-4 stretch that pulled them to within a half-game of the lead with a week to go before the All-Star break.

The Red Sox eventually reached the midpoint with a 52-44 record, 2 1/2 games behind the Yankees. The Baltimore Orioles were a game and a half out, while the Tigers had slipped to fourth and were six back.

In early August, Boston took three of five in a series at Baltimore and got to within one game of first, but the Sox again followed that up by sliding back, losing six of nine and being swept at home by the Oakland A's, the defending Series champs (and who would repeat in 1973).

Boston was now four games out, but they responded well and won ten of the next twelve. The problem was that the Orioles were heating up and in that stretch, the Red Sox actually lost ground.

On September 3, Boston was set to host Baltimore for a four-game set and the Orioles were leading by six games. The Red Sox were ahead of the Yankees and Tigers, but they needed to win three of four in this series if their pennant hopes were to stay alive.

Monday was a doubleheader and for 17 innings, it looked like Boston was ready to fold up shop. They trailed the opener 8-1 in the fourth inning and lost 13-8. They trailed 8-2 in the eighth inning of the nightcap. Then a rally that's arguably the most improbable in the long history of this franchise took place.

The Red Sox not only generated four singles, a double and an error to make a stunning seven-run rally against an opponent renowned for its ability to pitch in September, but they did it with their unknown bats. It wasn't Yaz or Fisk or even Cepeda coming up with the hits. It was Danny Cater, Mario Guerrero, Rick Miller and a still-developing Cecil Cooper that delivered the biggest hits in the stunning 9-8 win.

Another unknown was a hero on Tuesday. Luis Tiant and Jim Palmer staged an epic pitcher's duel. Each were still pitching in the 12th inning of a 1-1 game. Then Ben Ogilvie, still in the developing phase of his own career, homered off Palmer. If you were a Red Sox fan thinking this was destiny, you had reason. Especially when 21-year-old Dwight Evans homered on Wednesday to key a six-run second inning and a 7-5 win. Boston was four games out and still alive.

But the destiny storyline couldn't hold. The Red Sox lost two of three at home to Detroit and slipped 5 1/2 games out when it was time to play two more games with the Orioles, this time in Baltimore.

Again, Boston would not go quietly. Yaz, Cepeda, Miller and Fisk all had two hits in the opener. Tiant left with a 4-3 lead and another unknown—this time reliever Bobby Bolin—got the last seven outs in a 4-3 win. But the drive finally crested when Pattin gave up seven runs in the first four innings of an 8-3 loss.

Over the next two weeks, the Sox went 6-7 and fell 10 1/2 back. They swept the Milwaukee Brewers at home to end the year, but the decision on Kasko's fate was made—he was out as manager.

Kasko continued to have a great career in Boston. He moved into the scouting department and spent the next twenty years there, eventually becoming VP of Scouting & Development. Kasko was inducted into the Red Sox Hall of Fame in 2010. His managerial tenure was a success too—winning teams every year and his best team his final season. He just couldn't keep up with Baltimore.

## 1974

The 1974 Boston Red Sox had the most prolific offense in the American League and they slugged their way into first place and the heart of the pennant race. But that offense went silent at the season's crunch point and a pitching staff that lacked depth wasn't able to make up the difference as rookie manager Darrell Johnson was unable to return the franchise to the postseason.

It was a busy offseason leading and the Red Sox made a flurry of moves, none of which were particularly enlightened...



- They dealt Ben Ogilvie to the Detroit Tigers. That didn't hurt them in 1974, but it didn't help, and Ogilvie later became a star.
- Boston traded starting Marty Pattin to the Kansas City Royals for versatile pitcher Dick Drago. This one worked out better, but the rotation missed Pattin's reliability in taking his turn every fourth day.
- The rotation was further stripped by trading John Curtis to the St. Louis Cardinals. The Red Sox got back starting pitcher Reggie Cleveland and reliever Diego Segui—both were regulars on the mound and both were mediocre.
- But that wasn't the biggest move Boston made with St. Louis. The Red Sox dealt Reggie Smith—who by this point had surpassed Yaz as the team's best everyday player—to the Cards for Bernie Carbo and Rick Wise.

Carbo would become a Boston icon for his pinch-hitting skill, most memorably in Game 6 of the 1975 World Series, and Wise would turn into a decent starting pitcher a year later. Neither were as good as Smith..

For 1974, the pitching staff was completely dependent on Tiant and Lee. El Tiant threw over 300 innings, won 22 games and finished with a 2.92 ERA. Lee's ERA was higher, at 3.51, but he logged over 280 innings and won 17 games. The rest of the rotation was pieced together with a mix of Cleveland, Drago and Moret. Segui was the top reliever, but that didn't mean he was good, finishing with a 4.00 ERA.

Boston had to rely on its bats and with Smith gone, they needed people to step up. Yaz remained ever reliable, churning out a .414 on-base percentage and a respectable .445 slugging percentage, though his power was not what it had been a few years earlier.

The Red Sox gave regular playing time to 22-year-old Dwight Evans for the first time, and Evans rewarded them with solid numbers of .335 OBP/.421 slugging. Harper was in decline in left field, but he still stole 28 bases. Cecil Cooper, the good young DH/1B, began to slowly emerge and he batted .275.

Carbo didn't officially have a regular position, but he got plenty of at-bats and finished with a .364 on-base percentage. It wasn't a lineup that looked fierce on paper—especially when Fisk missed over 100 games due to injury—but it was balanced and kept scoring runs.

The season didn't begin well and Boston was 11-15 in early May, losing five of six at home to non-contenders in the Texas Rangers and California Angels. Tiant and Lee got it turned around, throwing consecutive shutouts at the New York Yankees and the Red Sox cleared the .500 threshold for good on May 21. They were only 23-20 going into Memorial Day, but managed to lead an AL East where all six teams were packed within three games of each other.

In early June, the two-time defending World Series champ (soon to be three-time defending) Oakland A's came to Fenway Park. The Red Sox won three straight, and the highlight was Tiant beating A's ace Vida Blue 4-1 in a game where Evans hit a three-run blast.

When Boston made the return trip west, another Tiant-Blue battle was on tap. The game was tied 1-1 in extra innings, both aces determined to finish what they started. Boston scraped over a run in the 11th, won 2-1 and also took two of three in the series.

The Tiant-Blue battles were the highlight of a 9-3 stretch for the Red Sox that saw them grow their lead as high as 4 1/2 games in the AL East.

But they lost six of seven at home to the Baltimore Orioles and Kansas City Royals, coming back to the pack. When the All-Star break arrived, Boston was 50-45, the AL East still within five games from top to bottom, and the Red Sox were in the lead.

In late July, the Yankees came to Fenway Park and Boston won three straight. They opened the series by beating Lyle on a walkoff and ended the series the same way. Then they swept a two-game series from the Orioles and won 15 of the first 22 games in August.

Boston's lead soared as high as seven games, but a 2-6 stretch leading into September tightened the race back up. On Labor Day, Boston was two games up on New York, plus-five on Baltimore and were going to old Memorial Stadium to play the Orioles in a three-game set.

The Red Sox had Tiant and Lee on tap for the first two games and their best pitchers answered the bell. Both threw complete games. Combined, they only gave up nine hits and two runs...and they both lost.

It was perhaps the most infamous display of offensive failure in Red Sox history. They mustered a combined five singles in the two games and wasted Tiant and Lee's brilliance, losing 1-0 each time. In the series finale, the Sox faced Cy Young winner Jim Palmer and got only three more singles, losing this one 6-0.

The best offense in the American League had failed to score a run in the biggest three games of the season to date. They had only eight hits and all were singles.

Boston stumbled out of Baltimore and lost nine of the next fourteen. When the Orioles made a return trip to Fenway for, the Red Sox were four games out, with the Birds and Yanks jousting at the top. This three-game set with Baltimore would be followed by a three-game series in the Bronx. It was now or never.



The offense improved against Oriole pitching in the opener, although that merely means they got a couple extra-base hits and actually scored a run. But one run was all they got, and Drago's strong outing was undone by solo home runs given up to Don Baylor and Boog Powell. Boston lost 2-1, and then trailed 5-1 in the ninth the next day. Finally, the bats awakened. Evans hit a three-run homer, the Red Sox tied it and they won in extra innings to keep their season alive.

But Reggie Cleveland took the mound in the finale and could only get two outs, resulting in a 7-2 loss. Boston was still five games back with a week left.

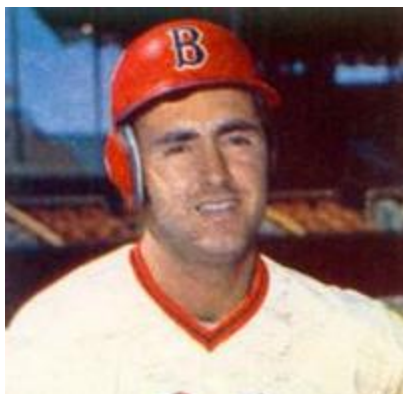
Tiant went into New York and threw a six-hit shutout to win the opener 4-0. Moret followed it up with a complete-game 4-2 win, as the Red Sox clung to their faint hopes. Lee pitched the finale and took a shutout into the ninth inning. But once again, there was no offensive support and the Yankees scraped over a run to win 1-0.

In the meantime, Baltimore just wasn't losing. From the beginning of September to the end of the regular season, the Orioles went 25-6. By the time the final weekend arrived, the Red Sox were five games out and eliminated. Baltimore finally outlasted New York on the season's penultimate day.

The Red Sox had stayed in contention all season long, but with a final record of 84-78, the record was actually worse than any since 1966. Fortunately, better days were ahead.

## 1975

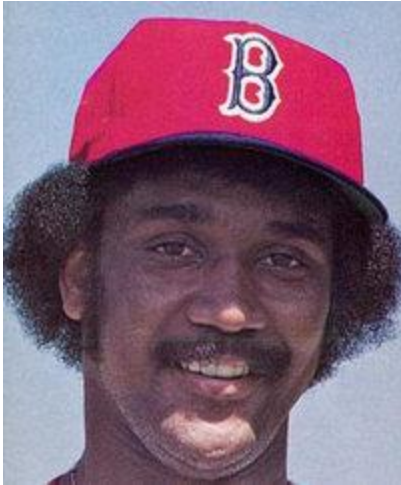
After the holding pattern of 1968-74, the 1975 Boston Red Sox scratched the seven-year itch, won the pennant and nearly ended the franchise's now 57-year drought on winning the whole thing.



Boston got back on top with the most potent offense in the American League, and it was keyed by two rookies in the outfield. Jim Rice began what was a Hall of Fame career in left field and allowed Yastrzemski to move to first base. Fred Lynn took over in centerfield and electrified all of baseball.

Lynn produced a stat line of .401 on-base percentage/.566 slugging percentage, drove in 105 runs and made spectacular defensive plays in Fenway Park's deep centerfield. He won the MVP award, the last rookie to do so. Rice posted a stat line of .350/.491 and drove in 102 runs.

While Lynn and Rice got the headlines in 1975, Boston had a third outstanding young outfielder who would have a long career in the Hub. Dwight Evans, blessed with a rifle arm, was in right field and he put up numbers of .353/.456 at the age of 23.



The trio of young outfielders combined with Yastrzemski—who posted a .371 OBP and hit 14 home runs—and one of the 27-year-old Fisk, whose numbers read .395/.529. Cecil Cooper had an excellent stat line of .355/.544. And let's not forget Bernie Carbo off the bench. The flaky lefthanded hitter delivered a .409 OBP and 15 home runs in part-time duty.

There were weak spots—Doug Griffin and Rick Burleson in the middle infield didn't hit very well and Petrocelli was in decline. But Boston's offense was the most prolific in the American League.

At least some of that productivity can be attributed to the dimensions of hitter-friendly Fenway Park and those same dimensions took their toll on the pitching staff. The Red Sox finished ninth in the AL in team ERA, but they made up for it with clutch pitching at the top of the rotation.

Tiant won 18 games with a 4.02 ERA. Lee won 17 with a 3.95 ERA. Rick Wise did the same thing. All three pitchers logged over 250 innings and took pressure off a bullpen that lacked depth. Reggie Cleveland and Roger Moret split duty between the bullpen and the rotation and combined to win 27 games. Drago handled what passed for the closer role in that era, saving 15 games with a 3.60 ERA.

The Red Sox didn't come blazing out of the gate, but they were able to win six of ten early games against the Orioles and Yankees. Boston was 20-17 on Memorial Day, but with most of the AL East also sluggish, that was good enough for first place.

It was a 13-game road trip in the late spring/early summer that the Red Sox started to get some separation. They went 9-4 and even though a four-game series in Baltimore ended with a split, that might have been the highlight of the trip.

Lee pitched the opener and it looked like a gem might be wasted, as Boston trailed 2-0 in the ninth inning. They rallied for three runs and took the lead. After Lee gave up a leadoff single in the ninth, he was removed for Cleveland, who promptly gave up the tying run on a two-out double. Drago came on and to pitch a couple clutch shutout innings of relief and eventually a sac fly from Burleson won it in twelve innings.

The Red Sox then lost consecutive games 3-0, the first on Saturday and the second the opening of a Sunday doubleheader. After the offensive collapse in Baltimore of 1974, this had to be more than a little concerning—other than the brief ninth-inning outburst of the opener, the bats were again silent.

Tiant got the ball for the back end of the doubleheader and settled everything down with a complete-game seven-hitter. The offense showed some life in a 5-1 win that got a split, and on the road that was more than enough. Boston came back home and played seven games against Baltimore and New York and went 4-3, continuing to steadily create space in the AL East.

Right before and after the All-Star break, the Red Sox got a nine-game winning streak going against AL West teams in Minnesota, Texas and Kansas City. The streak included three consecutive walkoff wins at home. Cooper hit a game-tying home run in one of the games and a game-winning single in another. The lead in the division stretched to 5 ½ games.

On August 3, the Boston lead had soared to 9 ½ games. They beat New York three of four in late July, the highlight being Lee outdueling Catfish Hunter in a 1-0 win. The Yankees were all but finished, but the Orioles were still lurking as the stretch drive approached. Boston was plus-six games on Baltimore when Labor Day arrived.

The Red Sox won 10 of their next 17, while the Orioles started to make a push. They cut the lead to 4 ½ games in time for a two-game head-to-head series on September 16 in Fenway Park. If Boston just won one game, it would all but seal the deal. A Baltimore sweep meant everyone would be on pins and needles the final two weeks.

The Hub was a nervous city when Tiant took the mound against Oriole ace Jim Palmer in the opener. Palmer would win the Cy Young Award this season. El Tiante never had the stats of the game's best pitchers. But this matchup showed why he was a gamer. Palmer was sharp and the Red Sox only scratched out two runs. But Tiant was better, twirling his way to a five-hit shutout.

The 2-0 win ended the drama in the AL East and the Orioles would never get closer. Boston finished the year with a 95-66 record and a 4 ½ game margin. They were finally heading back to the postseason.

## 1975 ALCS

The Oakland A's won three straight World Series from 1972-74, and the 1975 ALCS marked their fifth straight appearance in postseason play.

The ALCS opened in Fenway Park on the first Saturday of October. The Red Sox sent Tiant to the mound, while the A's countered with 18-game winner Ken Holtzman. Holtzman had a demonstrated record of big-game performance. Each were dialed in for Game 1 and an unearned run for the Red Sox in the second inning was the only score as the game went into the seventh.

Boston then broke through. Evans and Burleson hit back-to-back doubles with one out. Juan Beniquez singled to drive in Burleson and it was 3-0. Consecutive steals by Beniquez put him on third base.

The Oakland defense was a train wreck in Game 1, with four errors and a simple fly ball to center was dropped by Bill North, allowing another run in. With two outs, Fisk singled and Lynn drilled a two-run double. The close pitcher's duel had turned into a party at Fenway, and the game ended 7-1.

Oakland might not have played well in Game 1 and it might have been they—rather than a mostly young Boston team with precious few players tied to the 1967 pennant winning team—who looked like a deer in the headlights. But the A's veterans regrouped and struck early in Game 2.

Third baseman Sal Bando doubled with two outs and Reggie Jackson homered to give the A's a quick 2-0 lead in the first inning. Vida Blue, was on the mound and the A's added another run in the fourth on consecutive doubles from Joe Rudi and Claudell Washington.

Boston began coming back in the bottom of that same inning. Denny Doyle singled and Yastrzemski homered to cut the lead to 3-2. Fisk doubled and Lynn singled, resulting in an early hook for Blue. Even though Petrocelli hit into a double play, Fisk came in through the backdoor, the score was tied and Blue was out of the game.

Oakland still had the best reliever in the game, Rollie Fingers, in an era when you went to such a pitcher early and often—like the fifth inning of Game 2. Fingers came in after Cooper hit a leadoff double and escaped the jam, with help from Jackson, who nailed Cooper at the plate when he attempted to score on a sac fly.

The Red Sox were able to chip away at Fingers though. Yastrzemski doubled with one out in the sixth and scored the lead run on a base hit by Fisk. Petrocelli homered in the seventh. And in the eighth, Beniquez singled, was bunted over, and scored on a single by Lynn.

While Fingers struggled, Drago was getting it done. The Red Sox' top reliever tossed three scoreless innings, allowing only two hits and the Red Sox won 6-3.



Oakland still had the remainder of the ALCS on their home field and Game 3 would provide more than its share of back-and-forth on Tuesday.

The Oakland pitching staff was top-heavy in its reliance on Holtzman, Blue and Fingers and the Game 3 pitching decision illustrated it—with the season on the line, Holtzman would make the start on two days' rest.

Boston made an early mistake, when they got runners on first and second with one out in the top of the first—Doyle tried to tag and take third base on Jackson after a fly ball out. Doyle was gunned down. Making the final out of an inning at third base is a faux pas in any event, but it's even more so, when the league MVP—Lynn—is coming up to bat. The game stayed scoreless through three innings.

With two outs in the top of the fourth, the A's defense again helped the Red Sox. Washington committed a two-base error off the bat of Lynn and Petrocelli picked up the RBI single. In the top of the fifth, after a double by Burleson, Boston got another big two-out RBI single, this one from Doyle.

After a base hit from Yastrzemski, Holtzman was removed. Fisk hit an RBI single, Yaz moved up to third and eventually scored on a wild pitch. It was 4-0 and the Red Sox could start to at least sniff a pennant.

Oakland got a run back in the bottom of the sixth, but Rick Wise struck out Jackson with a man aboard to keep it a 4-1 game. The Red Sox added another two-out RBI single, this one from Cooper in the eighth, to make it 5-1.

There were six outs to go, but this wouldn't be the pre-2004 Boston Red Sox if everything went smoothly. The A's fought back in their own half of the eighth.

A single and an error set up RBI base hits by both Bando and Jackson, the two Oakland hitters who swung the bat well in this ALCS. The lead was cut to 5-3, there was only one out and Rudi was coming to the plate.

Drago came on, and induced Rudi to hit a ground ball to short, where Burleson started a 6-4-3

double play. All of New England could exhale and Drago closed the door in the ninth. Boston was going back to the World Series.

There was no MVP in LCS play at this time. There's also no doubt that it would have Yastrzemski, with his .455 batting average over three games, who would have won the award. Yaz was now 35-years-old and his push to be a part of the first Boston team to win a World Series since 1918 was a great story in of itself and that would of have driven media voting.

I'm not saying it would have been a bad choice, but since we have some historical liberty here, I'm going to say that Drago would have been the best choice for ALCS MVP in 1975. He pitched 4.2 IP of shutout baseball. He outdueled Fingers in the critical final frames of Game 2, the point at which the series really swung. And Drago closed the door in a very anxious situation at the end of Game 3.

Baseball fans would not get to see the Oakland A's dynasty take on the Big Red Machine in the World Series, but the coming battle ahead would more than make up for it.



## 1975 WORLD SERIES

Fenway Park was where the World Series opened, homefield advantage being determined by a rotation between the leagues. Tiant was on the mound for Boston. Don Gullett, 24-years-old and his star on the rise, got the ball for Cincinnati.



The Red Sox missed early opportunities. In the bottom of the first, with two on and one out, Evans was thrown out trying to score from second on an infield single and the rally was effectively killed. Boston loaded the bases with none out in the second and failed to cash in. With the bases loaded and one out in the sixth, Cincinnati centerfielder Cesar Geronimo caught a fly ball out and then threw out Lynn at the plate.

It was set to be a woulda-coulda-shoulda game for the Red Sox, but Tiant was unstoppable, twirling his way to a complete game shutout against the most feared lineup in baseball. And in the seventh inning, the Red Sox finally broke the door down.

Five singles and a walk, the first RBI coming from Yastrzemski, resulted in six runs. The game ended 6-0 and Boston had sent a message that this Series would not be a coronation party for the Big Red Machine.

Lee took the mound for Boston on Sunday and he continued the bafflement of the Big Red Machine. The Red Sox got an early run on a two-out RBI single from Fisk in the first. They missed a chance in the second when Evans was thrown out by Johnny Bench on an attempt to

steal third with two on and one out.

While Lee was at the plate (use of the DH also alternated each year, going opposite the rules for homefield advantage), thus perhaps accounting for Evans' aggression, the on-deck hitter was Cecil Cooper, who had already doubled in his first at-bat. Boston was giving away outs, and though it hadn't hurt them in Game 1, it would today.

The Reds finally got their first run of the World Series in the fourth, when Joe Morgan walked, took third on a single by Bench and scored on a productive out by Tony Perez. But Boston reclaimed the lead in the sixth, when a rare error by Cincy shortstop Dave Concepcion set up a two-out RBI single from Petrocelli.

It was still 2-1 in the ninth, when Bench led off with a double down the rightfield line. Lee was removed, and Drago came on. Perez again quietly did his job at the plate, hitting a grounder to the right side that put the tying run on third with one out. Drago induced George Foster to fly out to short left, but Concepcion then redeemed himself.

The speedy Cincy shortstop beat out an infield hit over the mound. Then he stole second, and scored on a double by Ken Griffey. Just like that, the Reds had a 3-2 lead and closed out the win. In spite of being outplayed for two games in Fenway Park, Cincinnati had picked up a road split and was going home for the next three games.

Ironically, these same two cities played in football on this Sunday afternoon and Boston fans had to feel like they were jinxed. The Bengals and Patriots were tied 10-10 into the third quarter, when a sudden outburst by Cincinnati resulted in a 27-10 win. Sunday just hadn't been Boston's day.

Tuesday night in Riverfront Stadium, on the banks of the Ohio River, continued the late inning drama. Fisk got the action started in the second with a solo home run. The Red Sox might have added to the lead in the fourth, but baserunning again cost them. With Fisk aboard and one out, Lynn singled, allowing the runner to get to third with less than two outs. For some reason, Lynn decided now was a good time to try and take second—he was thrown out and the inning ended, still a 1-0 game.

Rick Wise had been continuing the strong pitching that Boston's starters were giving, but the second time through the lineup didn't go as well. In the fourth, Perez walked and Bench homered to make it a 2-1 game.

Concepcion and Geronimo were the two lightest hitters in the Big Red Machine, there more for defensive brilliance and speed. But they still hit back-to-back home runs off Wise to start the bottom of the fifth.

With one out, Pete Rose finally started to put his imprint on this Series, with a triple, and then scored on a sac fly from Joe Morgan. The Reds seemed in command with a 5-1 lead, and could finally play to their biggest edge on the Red Sox—bullpen depth.

It was now Cincinnati's turn to beat themselves, at least just a little bit. Two walks and a wild pitch set up a sac fly from Lynn and a gift run for the Red Sox. In the seventh inning, Boston pinch-hit specialist Bernie Carbo—in what for Reds' fans was an ominous foreshadowing—hit a solo shot with two outs. And finally in the ninth, with a man aboard, Evans homered to tie the game 5-5.

The tenth inning lives on in World Series lore and Boston sports infamy. Geronimo hit a leadoff single. Ed Armbrister came up to bat in the pitcher's spot. He laid down a bunt, and it wasn't a good one, dying right in front of home plate. Fisk hopped out to try and make the play at second. Armbrister was in his way, and the throw was air-mailed into centerfield. The Red Sox screamed for an interference call. None came. There were runners on second and third and Morgan won the game with a single to center.

After two straight gutwrenching losses, the Red Sox found themselves on the brink, and they turned to the man who had the nickname "El Tiente." He didn't dominate like in Game 1, but he temporarily saved the Sox.



It didn't start well for Boston—Griffey and Bench hit RBI doubles in the first and with a 2-0 lead, the Reds seemed on the verge of blowing this World Series open. Then the Red Sox erupted for five in the fourth.

Fisk and Lynn started it with singles and an Evans triple tied the game. Burleson doubled and now the Red Sox were up 3-2. Cincinnati manager Sparky Anderson went to his bullpen. Pedro Borbon had been an effective horse all year long, and he'd closed out the NLCS in extra innings. Game 4 of the World Series wasn't his night.

Tiant singled. Perez committed an uncharacteristic error. Burleson and Yastrzemski each hit RBI singles and it was 5-2.

Cincinnati quickly countered with two in their own half of the fourth, as Concepcion and Geronimo delivered extra-base RBI hits. But the scoring ended there. Tiant got out of a 1st and 2nd/1-out jam in the fifth by getting Perez and Bench. In the ninth, the Reds loaded the bases with one out, but Tiant got Griffey on a line drive out and then Morgan popped up to end the game.

Tiant had won one game by dominating and other game by battling. A city that 28 years later would run manager Grady Little out of town for using staff ace Pedro Martinez beyond 100 pitches in the 2003 ALCS, cheered on El Tiente as he threw 163 pitches on three days rest.

Yup, it was a different time.

It looked the Red Sox might keep the momentum going in Game 5, when Denny Doyle hit a one-out triple and Yastrzemski picked him up with a sac fly. In the bottom of the inning, Rose was thrown out at the plate trying to score on a sac fly.

But now it was the Reds turn to play with at least modest desperation, not wanting to be in a 3-2 series hole going back to Fenway for the final two games. Perez hit a big home run in the fourth inning. In the bottom of the fifth, Gullett, who had won a game with his bat in the NLCS, now helped his cause in the World Series. The pitcher hit a two-out RBI single to break the tie and then Rose doubled him in.

Perez delivered the nail with a three-run blast in the fifth and after three straight games of constant drama, America got a yawner in Game 5. The Reds coasted home with a 6-2 win.

The final two games of the 1975 World Series are as memorable as any package of Game 6 & 7 in MLB history, but it took patience to get there. New England was hit with three days of rain. After the fifth game was played on a Thursday, the World Series did not resume until the following Tuesday night. For Boston, that meant the chance to go to Tiant one more time.

Game 6 has taken its place in baseball lore and Lynn electrified the home crowd with a three-run jack in the first inning to stake Tiant to a 3-0 lead. Anderson went to his bullpen early and often. He was on his third pitcher by the time the Red Sox put runners on second and third with one out in the fourth. Jack Billingham got Cooper and Doyle to keep it a 3-0 game.

In the fifth, the Reds broke a streak of 13 scoreless innings against Tiant at Fenway Park. Armbrister walked and Rose singled. Griffey tripled both runs in. Tiant seemed poised to escape with the lead intact when he got Morgan to pop out, but Bench got a two-out single to tie the score 3-3.

Tiant, even with the extra rest afforded by the weather, was starting to run on fumes and Griffey and Morgan led off the seventh with singles. The competitive pitcher got Bench and Perez and was again poised to escape—but again the damage came with two outs. George Foster doubled in both runs and the Reds were closing in on a championship.

Cincinnati seemed even closer when Geronimo hit a solo home run in the eighth and Tiant was finally removed. In the bottom of the inning, Lynn singled and Petrocelli walked. Anderson brought on his closer, Rawly Eastwick, who got Evans and Bureson.

The pitcher's spot was due up and Carbo came out to pinch hit. With his team down to their last four outs, Carbo crushed a pitch to dead center. It was gone, the game was tied, Fenway was alive and Anderson was second-guessing himself for ignoring a gut instinct to make a pitching change.

Boston was ready to win it in the bottom of the ninth when they loaded the bases with no outs and had Lynn at the plate. Yet another baserunning blunder cost them. Lynn hit a short fly to left and Foster had a cannon for an arm. The words “No, no”, were uttered by the third base coach. Doyle, the runner at third, thought he heard “Go, go”, and was easily gunned down at the plate.

The game went into the 11th. With one out and Rose aboard, Morgan came to the plate. It had not been a good World Series for the NL MVP. When he ripped a ball to deep right, it appeared all that was going to be put behind him.

Instead, Evans made an amazing over the shoulder catch on the dead run and kept his presence of mind to quickly turn and double off Rose, who had assumed what every rational person in America would have—that the ball had no chance to be caught.



It was all of this—Carbo’s jack, Doyle’s blunder and Evans’ heroics that set the stage for the play everyone remembers, and it’s Fisk hitting a long fly ball to left and waving his arms to try and command the ball fair. The ball hits the foul ball and stays fair, ending the game at 7-6 and sending us to a Game 7.

Perhaps the ultimate measurement of the greatness of Game 6 is this—it’s completely obscured a Game 7 that was tied going into the ninth inning.

Carbo was in the lineup and batting leadoff for Game 7 and he led off the bottom of the first with a double, but was not able to score. With one out in the third, Carbo drew a walk and Doyle singled. Another single from Yastrzemski put the first run of the game on the board.

For some reason, Anderson opted to walk Fisk and load the bases with Lynn coming up. I daresay an intentional pass to face the league MVP falls into the category of “unorthodox”. Or “stupid.”

Predictably, the move blew up. Even though Lynn struck out, Gullett walked both Petrocelli and Evans and the Red Sox had a 3-0 lead. Lee was on the mound and was pitching as well as he had in Game 2, taking that lead into the sixth inning and getting the first two batters out.

Rose then singled and Perez came to the plate. Lee decided to throw his gimmick pitch, the “Leephus”, where he lobbed it into the air softball-style. The pitch was supposed to get a power hitter to take a wild hack and pound it into the dirt.

Messing around with a pitch like this might be justifiable if you were struggling for outs. Not when you’ve spent the better part of two games owning a lineup. Lee’s choice of pitches makes

Anderson's intentional walk look like inspired brilliance by comparison. Perez hit a home run over the Green Monster and it was 3-2.

Lee was removed an inning later after a one-out walk to Griffey, another highly debatable decision, given that Boston's bullpen wasn't very good. The Red Sox advantage in this Series was that both Tiant and Lee were better than any starter Cincinnati had. Now both were done, and the remainder of Game 7 would be fought on the Reds' terms. Griffey stole second and Rose singled in the game's tying run.

The Cincinnati bullpen had been in lockdown mode since early in the game, and the top of the ninth began with a Griffey walk, and Geronimo bunting him to second. A ground ball out moved Griffey to third and Rose was walked. Morgan was at the plate again.

Whatever frustration Morgan had suffered throughout the series, whatever angst Evans had caused him the night before, it all went away on this at-bat against Jim Burton. A nasty breaking pitch was on the outside corner, but Morgan looped it up between Burleson and Lynn in short centerfield.

Morgan, in future years as an ESPN commentator, would acknowledge the quality of the pitch. But it scored the run that decided the 1975 World Series, as the Red Sox went quietly in the ninth.

I've often wondered why Game 7, a thriller, marked with could've and should've throughout, has been almost forgotten by history, while Game 6 is the subject of documentaries and even made its way into popular culture.

Maybe it's because more actors and writers are from Boston than from Cincinnati. Who knows, if Matt Damon grows up a Reds fan, maybe the scene between him and Robin Williams in *Good Will Hunting*, has Damon appalled that Williams gave up a ticket for Game 7 rather than Game 6.

Rose was named World Series MVP. His .485 on-base percentage was the best of the regular players. It was a good choice, although I'll admit to some sympathy for Geronimo—his OBP was lower, at .357, but he had two big home runs and the sacrifice bunt that made Morgan's hit possible.

Had Boston won the Series, the MVP likely would have been Tiant—even with finally getting hit in Game 6, he still had a 3.60 ERA over 25 innings and won two complete games. Evans, with a .393 OBP, .542 slugging percentage, and a game-saving catch in Game 6, would have had his own case.

What Cincinnati had—at long last, after 35 years of waiting—was a World Series trophy. What Boston had was a mix of heartbreak, dosed with strong optimism about the future.

## 1976

By rights, 1976 should have been a big year with another run at what was then an elusive championship for the franchise. Instead, the year was marked by drama off the field and underachievement on it.

Boston had five starters age 24 or younger—Lynn, Rice, Burleson, Evans and third baseman Butch Hobson. All but Hobson had been vital contributors to the 1975 pennant drive.

The 1976 Boston Red Sox were more than just the young players. Fisk had a few years additional experience and was at catcher. Yastrzemski was at first base, still productive at age 36—he hit 21 home runs with 102 RBIs in 1976. And 35-year-old Luis Tiant was still the ace of the rotation, with 21 wins and a 3.06 ERA.

But it never clicked for Boston. They were contract problems with Lynn and Fisk that overshadowed the team in the early going—this was right at the time that free agency was first becoming an option for large numbers of players and it created a lot of uncertainty and bad blood.

The Boston Red Sox front office, even in the glory days of the early 21st century, has always known how to pick fights with players unnecessarily and it was even worse in 1976.



The Red Sox front office did make a bold move when they bought the contracts of outfielder Joe Rudi and relief pitcher Rollie Fingers from the Oakland A's. Fingers and Rudi were both vital parts of the teams that won three straight World Series from 1972-74, but the sales—for straight cash, no players involved—were voided by commissioner Bowie Kuhn as being contrary to the best interests of baseball. Even when Boston tried to help themselves, it ended up shrouded in drama.

Boston lost on Opening Day in a 1-0 game to the Baltimore Orioles and Jim Palmer. Then from April 29 to May 11 the Red Sox lost ten straight, most to the Texas Rangers, who were far from being an American League power. It put the Sox in an 8.5 game hole. Then they won eight of nine, chipped back to within six games of the front-running New York Yankees and were poised to make a move upon arriving in the Bronx for a four-game set.

The four days in New York couldn't have gone worse. Perhaps it's typical of the Red Sox season that it started with a win. Boston took the opener 8-2, but an in-game brawl resulted in an injured shoulder for Bill Lee, who went to the disabled list.

Then the Red Sox led the second game 5-4 before giving up the lead in the ninth inning. They lost in the 12th after a two-out error by Doyle, a single and a game-winning hit by no-name

bench player Kerry Dineen. The third game saw the Sox drop a 1-0 gutwrencher in 11 innings, with Rice hitting into a big double play in the 10th when Boston was in position to get a run.

Even though Boston won the finale, got a split and was still theoretically in the race, they had blown a chance to win at least three and lost one of their best pitchers.

As you can imagine, the music all but died coming out of New York in late May. Boston fell ten games back by June 25. They were 40-40 at the All-Star break. Coming out of the break, the Red Sox played six games in Kansas City, the eventual AL West champ, over a four-day period. Boston lost five of them and fired manager Darrell Johnson.

Don Zimmer took over the managerial reins and Boston had a nice 21-11 spurt in September and October to finish the season over .500 at 83-79, good for third place in the AL East. But they were 15 ½ games behind New York and the fate of the 1976 Boston Red Sox was the first warning sign that the dynasty hopes of the previous October were going to go unfulfilled.

## 1977

The 1977 Boston Red Sox were able to rekindle the hope, with a strong run at the AL East title, but like so many pre-2004 Red Sox teams, managed to come up just a little bit short.

Boston could score runs, and power was their calling card. The Red Sox hit 213 home runs in 1977. Rice led the way, going deep 39 times and driving in 114 runs. Butch Hobson had 30 home runs and 112 RBIs. And though Boston would come to regret trading Cecil Cooper to the Milwaukee Brewers in a deal to get 33-year-old George Scott back in town to play first base, it worked out fine in '77. Scott hit 33 home runs.

Nor was Boston just about the power. They were second in the American League in on-base percentage and Fisk had an outstanding all-around offensive season. He finished with a .402 OBP/.521 slugging percentage, while popping 26 home runs himself. Rick Burleson had a .338 OBP at the top of the order.

Rightfield was split between Carbo and Evans. But whomever Zimmer put out there, it resulted in productivity. Carbo's numbers were .409/.522, while Evans was at .363/.526, and perhaps the best throwing arm in the game. Even with Lynn having a down year, the hitters were getting it done at Fenway.

And speaking of getting it done...the old veteran, 37-year-old Carl Yastrzemski, was as good as ever. He had a .372 on-base percentage and .505 slugging percentage. Yaz hit 28 home runs and drove in 128 runs, as he furiously chased the World Series ring that eluded him along with the rest of Red Sox Nation.

But a baseball team does not live by offense alone, and Boston had pitching problems. They



tried to fix them in the offseason with the splashy free agent signing of reliever Bill Campbell. He saved 31 games in 1977 with a 2.96 ERA, but the staff overall was still eighth in the AL—a killer problem to have against strong pitching staffs from their key rivals in New York and Baltimore.

Fergie Jenkins was the ace of the staff with a 3.68 ERA, but the 34-year-old former Cy Young winner (with the Chicago Cubs) only went 10-10. Every other starter, including the aging Tiant, had an ERA over 4. Bob Stanley and Mike Paxton were competent out of the bullpen, but there was just no shutdown starter or dominant reliever that this club could rely on.

Boston started the season 10-10 and was 3 ½ games back on May 3, before winning eight of eleven against non-contending AL West teams. The division race was tight early on, with the Sox, Yanks and Orioles all right on top of each other. The Red Sox closed May on a sluggish note, going 6-8 and ending the month 2 ½ games back.

Then they made their move, winning 17 of the first 21 games in June, and the big blow was a weekend series sweep of the Yankees in Fenway Park.



This series is remembered for Saturday afternoon, when a nationally televised game saw a dugout confrontation between New York manager Billy Martin and his rightfielder Reggie Jackson turn physical. But don't overlook how thoroughly the Boston bats unloaded over the weekend.

Boston scored thirty runs in the three-game sweep of their archrival. They hit 12 home runs, and no one was hotter than Yaz. The veteran went 9-for-14, drove in ten runs and hit four home runs in a weekend to remember. The Red Sox' lead in the AL East grew as large as five games, but a return trip to the Bronx brought them back to earth.

On June 24, a Friday night in New York, Boston had a 5-3 lead and was ready to close out another win. Campbell was on the mound and got the first two outs.

Then he gave up a triple to Willie Randolph, a home run to Roy White and the game was lost in extra innings. After losing on Saturday and trailing 4-1 on Sunday, the Red Sox rallied to tie the series finale in the ninth inning. Campbell promptly gave it back in the bottom of the ninth, and Boston was swept.

The Red Sox then dropped three straight in Detroit and three straight in Baltimore, showing how the lack of a rotation stopper left Boston vulnerable to long losing streaks. But even though the division lead had vanished, Boston still got to the All-Star break within a half-game of first place.

A soft schedule run of the California Angels, Seattle Mariners and Oakland A's resulted in an 11-game win streak for the Red Sox over late July and early August, and they built up a lead of

3 ½ games. But a trip to the future AL West champ Kansas City Royals resulted in a sweep and that started a seven-game losing streak.

While Boston was fluctuating wildly, New York was gaining traction and by Labor Day the Yanks led by 4 ½ games over the Red Sox and five on the Orioles.

Boston, contrary to their image, didn't fold up at the key moment of the season. They came on strong, with a 22-9 finish. The problem was that New York was too steady and the head-to-head matchups were done. The Yankees went 20-10 over this same period.

When the final weekend began, the Red Sox and Orioles both trailed the Yanks by three games with three to play. To make things easier for New York, they would play a bad Detroit team at home, while Boston and Baltimore had to play each other. Even though the Yanks lost on Friday and Saturday, the Red Sox knocked the Birds out on Friday and Baltimore returned the favor on Saturday. Boston's drive at the top of the AL East was over.

The 1977 Boston Red Sox still won 97 games and provided a lot of entertainment with the muscle of their offense. They were just a little too flawed in the pitching department to be the team that got the good people of New England over the top.

## 1978

Boston again went to the free-agent market to improve their pitching and this time they directly targeted their rival, raiding the Bronx for Mike Torrez. The #2 starter on the Yanks the previous year, he'd won two World Series games and he proved worth the investment in 1978. Torrez made 36 starts, finished with a 3.96 ERA and won 16 games.

And the Red Sox weren't done. They made two more significant deals. They put Rick Wise into a package of players that were sent to Cleveland in exchange for Dennis Eckersley, and they acquired second baseman Jerry Remy from the California Angels.

Remy and Eckersley each had Hall of Fame futures ahead of them in other areas. Remy as an analyst on the current Red Sox TV broadcast team and Eck as a closer for the great Oakland A's teams of the late 1980s/early 1990s (and later a Red Sox broadcast crew member himself). In 1978 they were both pretty good at what they did at second base and in the starting rotation.

Eckersley in particular was outstanding. He made 35 starts and was a 20-game winner. He and Torrez combined with Tiant as the regular horses of the rotation. Tiant finished with 13 wins and a 3.31 ERA.

The rest of the rotation was filled out in varying degrees by Lee—who spent the season on a shuttle between the rotation and Zimmer's doghouse, and Jim Wright. Lee and Wright each finished with ERAs in the 3s.



In the bullpen, 23-year-old Bob Stanley stepped up and threw over 140 innings, won 15 games and saved ten more, while posting a 2.60 ERA. He led a relief corps that got decent work from Drago and respectable—if disappointing innings—from the 1977 free agent prize in Campbell, who finished with a 3.91 ERA.

The Red Sox pitching still trailed that of the Yankees, but it was no longer subpar. Boston finished fourth in the American League in staff ERA in 1978. And the offense was still cranking out the runs.

Lynn and Evans enjoyed productive seasons again, each hitting 24 home runs. Fisk hit 20 more. Yaz finished with a .367 OBP. But no one hit like Jim Rice.

Rice had the best year of a Hall of Fame career in 1978. The 46 home runs were the highlight. He also finished with a .370 OBP. He drove in 139 runs and scored 121 more on his way to the MVP award.

The great year from Rice and solid seasons from the key supporting cast were enough to make up for a lack of offense across the infield. Remy was more of a defensive asset. Burluson's OBP was a woeful .295, though for some reason he still batted leadoff, with Remy hitting second. Butch Hobson had a mediocre stat line of .312/.408 at third and George Scott was unproductive at first base.

Boston's attack was still very good, but these weaknesses, combined with a resurgent offense from the Milwaukee Brewers, left the Red Sox "only" with the second-most runs scored in the American League.

Fenway Park has been good to the Sox over the years and it was especially so in the early part of 1978. They ripped off an 8-2 homestand in April and won eight of nine at home in May. By Memorial Day, they were 32-15. New York was two games back, although tied in the loss column.

In late June and early July, the Red Sox won eight of twelve games against the Yankees and Orioles. By the All-Star break their record was sizzling at 57-26 and they were nine games ahead of the Brewers. The more traditional rivals in New York and Baltimore were 11 ½ and 13 ½ back.

On July 19, Boston went to Milwaukee to open a ten-game road trip. Behind Torrez, the Red Sox took the opener 8-2. They were now an astounding 62-28. New York was in chaos, firing manager Billy Martin and replacing him with Bob Lemon. All was right with the world in New England.

As it turned out, the Red Sox won only one more time on the rest of the trip. By the time they came home, the lead was down to 4 ½ over the Brewers and 7 ½ over the Orioles. And the Yankees started to find their rhythm, closing to within 8 ½ games.

Boston faced a key five-game road trip in early August that would take them to the Bronx for two games and then on to Milwaukee for three. It was time to stop the bleeding.

When the Yankees jumped out to a 4-0 lead in the second inning of the opener, it looked like the collapse might be underway. But Campbell stepped up with 5.2 innings of shutout relief. The Red Sox chipped away and tied the game by the eighth inning, then won it in the 12<sup>th</sup>. The momentum carried right over to the next night. Rice homered and drove in three runs, Lynn hit a three-run blast in the seventh to break the game and Boston won 8-1.

The road show went to old County Stadium in Milwaukee. Lee lost the opener 6-2, unable to get out of the first inning. But Eckersley and Tiant took over on Saturday and Sunday, allowing just one run combined to the best offense in baseball. They also got plenty of support. Yaz and Remy each homered on Saturday, while Evans finished with three hits in an 8-1 win. Tiant's 4-0 complete game closed the successful road trip.

Boston concluded the weekend with their AL East lead back to seven games and then they beat Milwaukee three of four back in Fenway. In a normal year, this would have been enough to turn back the challengers.

But 1978 was no normal year, at least not in the AL East and certainly not in the Red Sox-Yankees rivalry. Boston lost five of eight games and New York was now playing like the Sox had in the middle of summer. The Yanks simply couldn't lose. By September 7, they had chipped their way to within four games as they arrived in Fenway for a Thursday thru Sunday weekend series.

Boston got 6 2/3 innings of from its starting pitcher. I'm not talking about the opener—I'm talking about *the entire series*. In an era where managers didn't go to their bullpens as freely as they do now. The Yankees not only swept the Red Sox, they crushed them, to the tune of a 42-9 scoring margin over the course of the four games. The AL East race was tied by the end of Sunday.

The Red Sox were a fighter that was staggering and they lost five of seven. With two weeks to go in the regular season, they trailed by 2 1/2 games. But they got up off the canvass and started delivering some blows of their own.

Boston won 11 of their next 13 games. They survived a fourteen-inning battle in Toronto. Torrez beat Detroit in a 1-0 duel. By the final day of the season, the Red Sox were back within one game of the lead. Tiant went to the mound and did what he does best—deliver in the clutch—shutting out the Blue Jays 5-0. The word came the Yankees had lost in Cleveland.

After 162 games, the Red Sox and Yankees were each 99-63. They were, without question, the two best teams in baseball. And on Monday afternoon they would play a single game in Fenway Park to settle the American League East.

### **1978 AL EAST TIEBREAKER**

New York would send Ron Guidry to the mound, a 24-game winner who would easily win the AL Cy Young Award. Boston countered with Torrez. It was the Red Sox who struck first, as

Yastrzemski, hungry for a World Series win, homered to lead off the top of the second.

The Yanks threatened in the third when speedy leadoff man Mickey Rivers hit a two-out double, but catcher Thurman Munson struck out. Boston challenged Guidry again in the bottom of the inning, when Scott doubled to lead off the inning. He was bunted over to third, but neither Burleson nor Remy could pick him up.

The score stayed 1-0 to the sixth when Burleson doubled, Remy bunted him to third and Rice singled him home. The lead was 2-0, but the inning ended when Fred Lynn lined out to right with two men on base.

It bears wondering if it was necessary for manager Don Zimmer to be so bunt-oriented in this game, something decidedly un-Red Sox. The sac bunt in the third was done by ninth-place hitter Jack Brohammer and understandable. But having Remy bunt when a man was already in scoring position, took away an out when Boston might have had a bigger inning. Then the fateful seventh inning arrived.



With one out, the Yanks got back-to-back singles, before Torrez induced pinch-hitter Jim Spencer to fly out. With the light-hitting Bucky Dent at the plate, the Sox were on the verge of getting out of the inning. Dent hit a fly ball to left that landed in the netting of the Green Monster. A stunned crowd saw the Yanks take a 3-2 lead.

Dent's home run has earned him the nickname "Bucky (expletive) Dent" in New England, but there was more drama packed in these final three innings than there were in the first six.

While the Red Sox couldn't finish off big innings, the Yanks added one more before the seventh was out, with Rivers drawing a walk, stealing second and then scoring on a double by Munson. In the eighth, Reggie Jackson hit a home run. The door for the New York offense had been

opened and they bashed it down.

Just as Boston's regular season was about more than a blown lead, but about a comeback after that, so too was this game. The Red Sox didn't lay down and die, even trailing 5-2 and facing feared Yankee closer Goose Gossage, who came in during the seventh inning.

In the eighth, Remy doubled and Yastrzemski drove him home. Consecutive singles by Lynn and Fisk cut the lead to one run, and even though they couldn't tie it up, the top of the order would have a chance in the ninth.

After an uneventful top of the ninth, Burleson drew a one-out walk. Remy singled to right and Lou Piniella lost it in the sun. Another stroke of Yankee good luck saw the ball fall right in front of Piniella and Burleson could only advance to second.

It proved to be an enormous play when Rice hit a long flyout to right and Burleson could only go to third rather than scoring. With Yastrzemski at the plate, the stage was set for a storybook finish. But pre-2004, Red Sox-Yankee stories always ended badly in Boston. Yaz popped out to third and it was over.

The Yankee-Red Sox playoff game was, at least briefly, the end of an era. Boston would not seriously challenge for the AL East title in September until their pennant year of 1986, and not until 1988 would these two historic franchises be directly involved in a big race against each other. Not until 2003 would anything approaching this drama take place.

## 1979

The '79 Red Sox came back off the canvas and still played good baseball, but they slipped just enough to fall well off the pace in the AL East.

Boston was defined by a potent offense and they led the league in runs scored. They simply hit the heck out of the ball—the Red Sox led the league in batting average, doubles and home runs, while being in the bottom half of the AL in walks.

Rice came off his MVP season of 1978 and delivered 39 home runs and 130 RBI. Lynn had an amazing year in centerfield--39 home runs of his own and a .333 batting average, 122 RBI and scored 116 runs. That Lynn, also an excellent defensive centerfielder, finished fourth in the MVP voting, is an indictment of the voters.

The outstanding outfield was rounded out by rightfielder Evans, who finished with a .364 on-base percentage/.456 slugging percentage, while being another terrific defensive player.

But the assault didn't stop there. Yastrzemski was 39-years old, but still hit 21 home runs and finished with a .346 OBP in his DH duties. Hobson popped 28 home runs. The Red Sox

acquired first baseman Bob Watson in mid-June and Watson hit .337. One only wonders how much offense this team would have produced had Fisk not been limited to 91 games.

The pitching wasn't bad—it was fifth in the American League in ERA, but they lacked depth and a clear stopper. Torrez was reliable in taking his turn, logging 252 innings. But the work was often mediocre, with a 4.49 ERA. Stanley, a starter/reliever hybrid did most of his 1979 work out of the rotation and had a nice 16-win season with a 3.99 ERA.

Eckersley was the best of the starters, going 17-10 with a 2.99 ERA. But the rotation was damaged badly by a terrible offseason trade—the Red Sox shipped lefthander and Yankee-killer Bill Lee off to the Montreal Expos for infielder Stan Papi.

The problems with Lee were all personal and not business. Zimmer didn't like Lee—who was admittedly a pain in the posterior. But there's no evidence the lefty was a clubhouse poison and the Red Sox lost a valuable arm for a player who never made an impact.

Relief pitching was similarly thin. Drago won 10 games and saved 13, while Tom Burgmeier finished with a 2.74 ERA. But there weren't good options after that.

Boston showed no signs of a hangover from the previous October. They won six of eight in a mid-April homestand, capping it off by sweeping the three-time defending AL West champion Kansas City Royals and scoring 25 runs in the trio of wins. The Sox put together a manageable 5-4 trip to the West Coast and then started the month of May with 10 wins in 16 games, including splitting six with the Yankees and the Baltimore Orioles.

The Sox briefly slowed toward the end of May, with a 5-6 road trip, but they were still just two games back of Baltimore and narrowly ahead of the Brewers and Yankees as the calendar turned to summer.

What Boston was up against in 1979 was made crystal clear in the month of June. The Red Sox played terrific baseball and went 20-8...yet they managed to lose ground to Baltimore, and the AL East deficit was 4 1/2 games at month's end. Winning six of nine leading into the All-Star break helped the Sox crawl back to within two games.

It was clear the Orioles, and not the Yankees, were going to be the team to beat and a terrible tragedy on August 2 finalized that. New York catcher and team captain Thurman Munson died in a plane crash, flying his private plane to his Ohio home on an off-day. A pall was cast over the entire season.

On the field, the Red Sox slipped into mediocrity. On the positive side, they took three of four in Milwaukee, who would ultimately win 95 games. Boston closed to within 4 1/2 games of Baltimore in late August, and still had seven games left with Baltimore in September. But a three-game series in Kansas City undid all of that.

The Red Sox faced rookie Craig Chamberlain in the Friday opener at Royals Stadium. Chamberlain had made two great starts to begin his career, and he made another tonight, beating Boston 4-2. Chamberlain began to slow down the rest of the season and never made another major league start after 1979. This would be just one of countless instances of a pennant race being affected by the unknown player.

On Saturday afternoon, Torrez gave up a leadoff home run to Kansas City's Willie Wilson. Torrez pitched brilliantly the rest of the way, but lost a duel to KC's Dennis Leonard. Wilson kept it going on Sunday, with four hits and a 6-3 loss completed the sweep.

Those three straight losses in Kansas City were the beginning of a 3-9 stretch that preceded Baltimore's September arrival in Fenway Park. By this time, Boston was eleven games out and the fact they dropped three of four to the Birds barely registered. Baltimore won 102 games and coasted home to the AL East crown.

Boston still won 91 games, and finished with a better record than the AL West champion California Angels. By the standards of today, the Red Sox were a playoff team with room to spare. In the tougher world of 1979 MLB, they were getting further from October, not closer.

**1980**

This would be Don Zimmer's final year in Boston. The offense, long the strength of the team, was still good—sixth in the American League in runs scored—but it was no longer great. An inability to draw walks was the big reason. Boston ranked in the top three in the AL for batting average doubles and home runs, but they were 10th in walks. It would take over two decades for Moneyball to arrive at Fenway Park.



Dave Stapleton was the poster child of the Red Sox offense—he batted .321 and slugged .463, excellent numbers for a second baseman. But he managed to draw only 13 walks all season, and his .338 on-base percentage was only above average as a result. Stapleton, like the Red Sox, was more glitter than substance when it came to offense.

This isn't to say there weren't good hitters, Stapleton included. Carlton Fisk had a solid stat line of .353 OBP/.467 slugging. Fred Lynn posted a .383/.480 year and Dwight Evans was at



.358/.484. Jim Rice slugged .504, hit 24 home runs and produced 86 RBIs. Although Rice was almost as impatient as Stapleton, with the left fielder's 30 walks being the second-lowest on the team.

Carl Yastrzemski was in the twilight of his career and now a DH, but he still produced, at .350/.462 and Rick Burleson had a .341 on-base percentage. The team also signed Tony Perez to play first base.

Boston fans remembered Perez for hitting the home run that turned the momentum in that seventh game of the 1975 World Series. Now 38-years-old, Perez could still produce, hitting 25 home runs and his 105 RBIs led the team.

So while the offense was not as good as its batting average and home run numbers might have suggested, it was still not the problem. That honor belong to a pitching staff that ranked 12th in the American League in ERA.

Mike Torrez and Dennis Eckersley were the top two starters and they combined for a 21-30 record, and ERAs of 5.08 and 4.28 respectively. John Tudor was a nice young lefthander who had a 3.02 ERA, but he didn't get enough starts to make an impact.

The only positives were closer Tom Burgmeier, who saved 24 games with 2.00 ERA, and the all-purpose machine, Bob Stanley. The "Steamer", as he was known started 17 games, made 35 relief appearances, won 10, saved 14 and had an ERA of 3.39. On a staff with few bright spots, Stanley could do everything.

The first two games of the year at the Milwaukee Brewers were a foreshadowing. The Red Sox trailed the Brewers 5-3 in the ninth inning of Opening Day, when home runs by Yaz and Butch Hobson tied the game. Dick Drago came on in the ninth. With the bases loaded and two outs, Drago gave up a grand slam to Brewer rightfielder Sixto Lezcano and the Red Sox lost 9-5.

Torrez pitched the second game and was battered 18-1. Later on in May, when the Brewers came to Fenway, Torrez started again and lost 19-8. By the end of May, Boston's record was 22-23. They trailed the New York Yankees by 6 ½ games.

New York was on their way to a big year with 103 wins and while the Baltimore Orioles were amidst the pack in May, they would also catch fire and win 100 games. Boston wasn't going to compete with that, though they did play good baseball throughout the month of August and their record got up to 70-56 when the month of September began. By the standards of today, the Red Sox would have been in the hunt for the second wild-card spot.

But the standards of 1980 were quite different, and in either case, Boston's September play marked the end of the Zimmer era. They lost four straight at home to New York, then went to the Bronx and lost two of three. To show they weren't playing favorites in the AL East race, the Red

Sox went to Baltimore and lost two of three and then lost four straight to the Orioles at home.

Zimmer was fired prior to the finale of the four-game set with Baltimore and Johnny Pesky managed out the string in Boston. They concluded the season by being swept at home by the Toronto Blue Jays, a last-place 67-95 team. The Red Sox finished 83-77, fifth in the seven-team AL East.

Big moves were made in the offseason. Burlison, Hobson and Lynn were all traded, while Fisk was allowed to leave via free agency for the Chicago White Sox. The latter two changes were particularly rattling. Lynn's MVP season in his rookie year of 1975 made him the face of the presumed dynasty on the rise. Fisk was a local hero with New England roots and seen as the heart and soul of the team.

By parting company with both, the Red Sox left little doubt there were going in a new direction. It would take six years for that new direction to bear fruit and the Fenway Faithful entered the offseason following 1980 wondering when their team would be relevant again.