

BLUE JAY DYNASTY

Toronto From 1983-93



Major league baseball came to Toronto in 1977. The rules for expansion franchises were considerably less generous than is the case today and it took some time for the newly established Blue Jays organization to build. But with a future Hall of Fame general manager in Pat Gillick as the architect, the club gradually put young pieces in place. By 1982 they were at least playing modestly respectable baseball. And in 1983, Toronto posted their first winning season.

That '83 season was the beginning of something special. A decade-plus where the Toronto Blue Jays were the most consistent franchise in the major leagues. In the eleven seasons from

1983-93, Toronto won five AL East titles, two American League pennants and both of those pennants were turned into World Series trophies.

Blue Jay Dynasty will cover this entire 11-year period of excellence, from its breakthroughs to its heartbreaks to its ultimate vindication. You'll read about the following...

*The first years of success in 1983 and 1984, as the Blue Jays put themselves on the radar of baseball fans around the country.

*The big breakthrough of 1985, when Toronto outfought the New York Yankees to win the AL East. And the first big heartbreak that same year, when they coughed up a 3-1 series lead in the American League Championship Series.

*An even bigger heartbreak came in 1987. After an off-year in '86, the Blue Jays stormed back with one of the best teams in baseball. They waged one of the game's all-time great pennant races against the Detroit Tigers. The Jays were poised to win it and go into the postseason as the favorite...until an epic collapse in the final week.

*That '87 collapse on top of the '85 heartbreak meant the "can't win the big one" tag was unfortunately applied to this model organization. Watch Toronto navigate the next four years. There were more successes—division titles in 1989 and 1991, but never a trip to the World Series.

*Finally the vindication moments of 1992-93. Toronto took the final step, not only winning the AL East and then bringing the World Series to Canada for the first time, but winning the Fall Classic. When they won the '93 World Series on one of baseball's historic moments, they were the first back-to-back champions in fifteen years. The tag "can't win the big one" was replaced with a new tag—one that read "Dynasty."

They're all here. Great managers from Bobby Cox to Cito Gaston. The best outfield in baseball of George Bell, Jesse Barfield and Lloyd Moseby. The emergence of stars like Roberto Alomar and Fred McGriff. Reliable arms from Dave Stieb to Juan Guzman to Jimmy Key. Key free agent pickups that ranged from Jack Morris to Dave Stewart to Paul Molitor. Names you may have forgotten, but were crucial to the franchise's early success—like Damaso Garcia, Willie Upshaw and Rance Mulliniks. You'll read about all of them in *Blue Jay Dynasty*.

All eleven seasons of *Blue Jay Dynasty* have their own article published individually on TheSportsNotebook.com. So do the seven postseason series the Blue Jays played in during this period. All eighteen articles are pulled together for this compilation and edited for cohesion.

One example of the editing is that each article on the website reminds readers of the divisional alignment and playoff format that existed in this era. For the sake of narrative flow, those were edited out of the compilation, but for anyone who needs a brief reminder, here's how it worked...

Each league was split into just two divisions, an East and a West. Only the first-place team could advance to the postseason and went directly into the League Championship Series.

Toronto had to win a seven-team AL East that included Detroit, Cleveland and Milwaukee (an American League team until 1998) along with current members in New York, Boston and Baltimore.

It was a challenging era, a fun one and a particularly great time to be a Blue Jays fan. On with our story...

1983

Willie Upshaw played first base and was a productive all-around hitter, finishing with a stat line of .373 on-base percentage/.515 slugging percentage. Upshaw also slugged 27 home runs and drove in 104 runs. A pair of 23-year-old up-and-comers were in the outfield. Lloyd Moseby, already in his fourth season playing centerfield posted a stat line of .376/.499. And Jesse Barfield, the right fielder with a rifle arm, hit 27 dingers and slugged .510.

Moseby and Barfield would eventually join with George Bell to form one of baseball's great outfields in the 1980s. Bell was still breaking in and played only 39 games this year. The left field job for 1983 was in the hands of Dave Collins, who stole 31 bases.

A deep lineup also had Rance Mulliniks who was a steady hitter over several years at third base and his stat line was .373/.467. Damaso Garcia, a talented young second baseman, batted over .300. Cliff Johnson, the veteran DH, hit 22 home runs. Barry Bonnell got over 400 at-bats coming off the bench and his stat line clocked in at .369/.469. In an American League filled with quality lineups, Toronto ended up third in runs scored.



The starting rotation was anchored by Dave Stieb. A reliable workhorse, Stieb made 36 starts, logged nearly 280 innings, won 17 games and finished with a 3.04 ERA. How Stieb didn't get any points in the Cy Young voting is a mystery that can only be explained by the lack of exposure Toronto suffered from.

Jim Clancy was another steady workhorse, going 15-11 with a 3.91 ERA. Luis Leal and Jim Gott had ERAs in the low 4s and each made 30-plus starts. The steadiness of this core four in the rotation, combining for 135 starts, made up for a spotty bullpen that lacked depth and had no reliable stopper. The Blue Jays were able to finish a respectable seventh in

the 14-team American League for staff ERA.

After going 9-10 through April, the Jays started to cash fire in May, winning four straight series. Then they went 4-3 in a stretch of games against the Brewers and Orioles, who had battled to the final day of the regular season for the AL East title in 1982.

The Jays took two of three from a Tiger team that was on the rise. By Memorial Day, the entire division was still within six games of each other, but Toronto was tied for first with Boston.

A summer road trip that included stops in Detroit and Baltimore slowed the momentum, and the Blue Jays went 5-7. But they got momentum back against the weaker AL West, going 11-5. By the All-Star break, Toronto was 43-33 and in sole possession of first place, a game up on Baltimore. Detroit was two games back, New York trailed by 2 ½, Boston was four out and Milwaukee was five games off the pace.

It was anybody's race, but these up-and-coming Blue Jays were one of baseball's great stories in the summer of 1983. Over on the east coast of Canada the same could be said of the Montreal Expos, who were also in first place. A *Sports Illustrated* cover story saluted "Those Canadian Clubs".

If anyone thought Toronto was going to fade with the arrival of the second half, they were mistaken. The Blue Jays came out of the break and swept the AL West-leading Texas Rangers. The Jays took two of three in Kansas City, the West's perennial power. Toronto won three of four from the Chicago White Sox, the team that ultimately captured the West with a 99-win season.

All of these wins were on the road, which made the ensuing homestand even more disappointing. Facing these same teams, the Blue Jays lost seven of eleven and slipped into second place. But they quickly bounced back, grabbing three of four from the contending Yankees.

On the first weekend of August, the Orioles held the division lead, but the Blue Jays were still only two games back. Everyone except the Red Sox and Indians were still within five games of the lead. Four months after the season started, this AL East race was still anyone's to take.

The potent Toronto bats went quiet in Milwaukee, being shut out twice in a three-game sweep. The pitching failed in New York, giving up 19 runs in the two games that were lost in a three-game set. It set up a big four-game set with the Brewers who were coming north and looking to repeat as American League champions.

Doyle Alexander, a 32-year-old veteran, had been picked up in mid-summer to fill out the fifth spot in the rotation. His final numbers for the season ended up respectable, but at this critical juncture, he was in a slump. Alexander opened the series on Thursday night with his seventh straight loss, a 6-4 decision.

But Moseby turned the momentum around on Friday night with a two-run homer that keyed a 5-4 win. Clancy battled gamely against a good Brewer lineup on Saturday afternoon, scattering eleven hits and winning 3-1. And Moseby came through again on Sunday, with a big home run helping Toronto win 4-3.

This young team had passed a key test, turning around negative momentum against a more battle-tested opponent and the Jays stayed within 2 ½ games of the lead. On August 23, they went to Baltimore for an even bigger three-game set.

Moseby kept on coming through in Tuesday's opener, driving in three runs. Garcia sparked the lineup with three hits and Toronto won 9-3. Wednesday night's game went into extra innings tied 3-3. When Johnson homered in the eleventh, the Blue Jays were on the verge of another big win.

But it turned out that would finally be the point when Toronto ran out of gas. The bullpen woes caught up to them. The pen gave up two runs and lost 5-4. On Thursday, a scoreless tie went to the 10th. Bonnell homered. Toronto could still take this series. But the pen gave up two runs and lost 2-1.

The relief pitching nightmare continued in Detroit. The Blue Jays lost two of three—one of the losses in extra innings, the other one when they gave up a 2-1 lead in the ninth. Over the course of a long baseball season, every team's weaknesses find them. And Toronto's weakness got them here.

Baltimore would end up blowing this race away and going on to win the World Series. Toronto's September was uneventful from a pennant race standpoint, with most games being against the AL West. But the Blue Jays still finished the season 89-73.

In the brutal AL East, that was only good for fourth place. But it was fifth-best in the American League overall and eighth-best in the majors. By the standards of today, the 1983 Toronto Blue Jays played playoff caliber baseball.

More importantly, they had arrived and weren't going away anytime soon.

1984

The 1984 Toronto Blue Jays solidified the progress that had been made. They posted another solid campaign and established that the breakthrough of '83 was no fluke. Only playing in a division with the best team of the 1980s kept them from the postseason.

A talented outfield that would become one of the most heralded in baseball played their first season together in 1984. Bell stepped into the left field job and hit 26 home runs. Bell joined an outfield that already had Moseby in center and Barfield in right. Moseby finished with a stat line of .368 on-base percentage/.470 slugging percentage in 1984. Barfield, in addition to being a terrific defensive right fielder with a rifle for an arm, posted a stat line of .357/.466.

The corner spots of the infield were in productive hands. Upshaw played first and slugged .464. Mulliniks was at third and his OBP was .383. Cliff Johnson provided more muscle with a .507 slugging percentage and his OBP was a sparkling .390.

Toronto's well-balanced offense also had table-setters. Garcia was a good contact hitter at second base. Dave Collins, the veteran fourth outfielder, got playing time and stole 60 bases. The shortstop's job was mostly in the hands of Alfredo Griffin, known more for his glove than his bat. But a transition was beginning to 22-year-old Tony Fernandez who would become known for both.

All told, the Blue Jay offense ranked fifth in the American League in runs scored.

The pitching staff was anchored by four reliable veterans who combined to make 142 starts. Stieb was the rotation ace and he won 16 games with a 2.83 ERA. Doyle Alexander racked up 17 wins and his ERA was 3.13. Leal's 13 wins came with a 3.89 ERA.

Where Toronto staff started to have problems was with an off-year from Clancy, whose ERA was up at 5.12. The bullpen lacked a reliable stopper and no one who put in any consistent time in relief had an ERA lower than 3.65. The quality of the top three still kept the Blue Jay staff ranked fifth in the AL for composite ERA, but the lack of depth would hold Toronto back.



The Blue Jays came out of the gates firing on all cylinders. In mid-April they hosted the defending World Series champion Baltimore Orioles. Alexander locked up with Baltimore's Mike Boddicker, an October hero in 1983 in the series opener and a 2-2 game went to the eighth inning. Upshaw doubled, Bell drove him in and the Jays took a 3-2 win.

On Wednesday it was Collins who knocked out three hits, drove in three runs and keyed an easy 7-1 win behind Stieb. The Thursday afternoon getaway finale saw Clancy battle Oriole lefty Scott McGregor. A 1-1 tie went to the ninth. Upshaw again got something started with a base hit. Backup infielder Garth Iorg tripled in the run. The Blue Jays had completed the sweep.

Toronto went on to win all six games they played against eventual AL West champ Kansas City. The Blue Jays swept a three-game set over the Chicago White Sox, who had won the West the year before. And Toronto delivered another three-game sweep over Minnesota, who contended to the final week of the season.

By Memorial Day, the Blue Jays were 31-14, riding high with the second-best record in baseball. There was only one problem. The Detroit Tigers were even hotter. So even though Toronto was red-hot, they were five games out of first place heading into the summer. By an early June series in Detroit, the first head-to-head shot at the Tigers, the deficit was still 4 ½ games. This was Toronto's chance to dent that lead.

Stieb pitched Monday night's opener and the ace was staked to a 3-0 lead that he carried into the seventh inning. But the Tigers rallied to tie the game. Jimmy Key came on in relief. The young lefty would become a reliable starter by next season. Right now he was still an untested part of a spotty bullpen and he gave up a three-run homer in the 10th.

It was a tough loss, but the Blue Jays bounced right back. They won Tuesday's game 8-4, thanks to a six-run fourth inning where catcher Ernie Whitt hit a three-run blast. Upshaw hit an early two-run homer on Wednesday and Leal won 6-3.

Even though Clancy lost the Thursday afternoon finale to Detroit ace Jack Morris, the Blue Jays had managed to split on the road. When Detroit made the return trip across the border a week later, the Toronto bats unloaded for 23 runs in three games and won twice.

The head-to-head with Detroit wasn't the problem. The problem was what happened in between the series at Tiger Stadium and the follow-up at old Exhibition Stadium. It was a weekend in New York against the Yankees. Toronto lost the opener 4-3 in eleven innings. Stieb lost a heartbreaking 2-1 duel to New York ace Ron Guidry.

Toronto won the finale 13-5, but by the time this entire schedule stretch was completed, the Blue Jays had not cut into the Tigers' divisional lead. By the All-Star break, Toronto was still 50-34, still the second-best team in baseball...and seven games out of first.

The Blue Jays continued to play well in the late summer. They won five of seven from the Orioles and six of seven from the Twins. But losing four straight to the Royals held Toronto back in the divisional race that had no room for error. On Labor Day, Toronto's record was 79-57 and they were 8 ½ games behind Detroit.

Making a pennant run was a longshot against this good of a frontrunner and Toronto did not play well in September in either case. They dropped another series in New York. And when Detroit came to town and delivered a three-game sweep, it was all but over. The Tigers ended the season with a dazzling 104 wins and cruised through the postseason. Toronto finished the season at 89-73.

It was the same record as 1983. But even so, this felt like progress. The Blue Jays still ended up with the fourth-best record in baseball. They would have won the much weaker AL West with room to spare. They were clearly a playoff team by the standards of today. And they would soon be a playoff team by the standards of their own era.

1985

When 1985 began, the expectation was that Toronto's time had come. Cox and Gillick had a lineup stocked with young talent. Everyone except Whitt and various veteran DH's were between the ages of 25 and 29. The best of the group was Barfield, with 27 home runs, 84 RBI and 22 stolen bases. Bell hit 28 homers, drove in 95 runs and swiped 21 steals.

Moseby in center stole 37 bases, and a third-base platoon of Mulliniks and Iorg consistently produced. Mulliniks finished with a stat line of .383 on-base percentage/.454 slugging percentage, while Iorg was at .358/.469.

The pitching was even better, with a staff anchored by Stieb, with his 14 wins, 2.48 ERA and 265 innings pitched. Alexander went 17-10 with a 3.45 ERA. Key won 14 of his own with a 3.00 ERA and logged over 200 innings. Clancy was steady, with a 3.78 ERA.

Gillick strengthened the bullpen in the offseason, dealing Griffin to the Oakland A's for reliever Bill Caudill. In addition to opening up the shortstop job to a talented kid in Tony Fernandez,

Caudill gave the Jays 14 saves and a 2.99 ERA. He joined Dennis Lamp, who finished 11-0 with a 3.32 ERA in over one hundred innings. Jim Acker saved 10 games with a 3.23 ERA. And another Gillick find—Tom Henke, chosen in the compensation draft—had 13 saves as a 27-year-old rookie.



Toronto opened the season in Kansas City, facing a Royals team they would see more of and played three straight one-run games. Toronto won two, both in extra innings and Caudill pitched a combined four shutout innings over the two games.

The Jays were off and running and by Memorial Day they were 28-14. The AL East was tough, so the lead was only three games over Detroit, with Baltimore 4 ½ back, and New York six games back.

Toronto's lead grew to as many as six games in June, but they had a pitching malfunction in Fenway Park. The Blue Jays gave up 26 runs in four games to an

otherwise pedestrian Boston Red Sox team, then dropped two of three to the mediocre Milwaukee Brewers and it was the Yankees who took advantage, moving to within 2 ½ games by the All-Star break. Detroit was still 3 ½ out, while Baltimore was fading.

The early part of the second half saw the Blue Jays ride an extreme roller-coaster. They went on a 15-2 run that saw their lead over the Yankees soar to as many as nine games, with the Tigers falling by the wayside. The Jays then went 5-7 while the Yanks got red-hot and the lead was quickly back to three. It was a two-team race for the AL East flag and Toronto still led by 2 ½ games when they traveled to the Bronx for a big four-game series starting September 12.

Stieb matched up with New York ace Ron Guidry in the Thursday opener and Toronto had a 4-1 lead in the seventh. Then the Yankees started to rally off Stieb, the bullpen couldn't stop the bleeding and six runs later New York had a come-from-behind win. One of baseball's two youngest franchises was now in the sport's most heralded venue and facing a Yankee team with momentum.

Al Oliver was a veteran acquisition Gillick made during the summer, to provide a left handed bat at DH and off the bench. On Friday, Oliver came through with a three-RBI game and reliever Gary Lavelle—one of those who failed on Thursday—pitched three clutch innings of scoreless relief. Toronto stopped the momentum with a 3-2 win.

On Saturday, the game was tied 2-2 in the fifth, when Yankee manager Billy Martin pulled an early trigger and brought in closer Dave Righetti. Toronto lit up Righetti and won the game 7-4. On Sunday, Toronto pounded out fourteen more hits, scored six runs in the third inning and won 8-5. They had righted the ship and left New York with a 4 ½ game lead.

Toronto kept surging, New York began to slump and the Blue Jays bolted to a 7 ½ game lead. The margin was trimmed to 5 ½ with a week to go, but hardly seemed a cause for alarm. Then the Blue Jays—perhaps in an ominous foreshadowing of 1987—lost three straight to Detroit to begin the final week. The lead was cut to three games with three to play—and the Yankees were coming to Canada for one last three-game set.

Key pitched on Friday night and with seven strong innings, a 3-2 lead was turned over Henke in the ninth. He got the first two outs and the celebration was ready to start. Then Yankee catcher Butch Wynegar homered. A single, a walk and a Moseby error later and the Jays had a stunning 4-3 loss. Once more, they had the chance to fold in the face of the aura of the Pinstripes.

And once more, they answered. Whitt, Upshaw and Moseby all hit solo home runs early in Saturday's game. Alexander threw a complete-game five-hitter and with the 5-1 win, the time had finally come for the party to start in Toronto. They were moving on to face Kansas City in the American League Championship Series.

1985 ALCS

Both teams had gone to the second-last day of the regular season to clinch their ALCS berths, but Toronto's pitching rotation fell more naturally aligned, with Stieb available to start Game 1. Kansas City countered with lefty Charlie Liebrandt.

The difference in pitching showed up immediately, as the Blue Jays attacked Liebrandt quickly. Barfield led off the bottom of the second with a single, Upshaw was hit by a pitch, then Whitt and Fernandez each hit RBI singles.

In the home half of the third, Cliff Johnson led off with a double, Barfield walked and Upshaw singled to load the bases. Liebrandt was removed, but Mulliniks greeted reliever Steve Farr with an RBI single, Whitt drew an RBI walk and Fernandez hit a sac fly. The teams traded runs in the fourth, and Stieb turned in eight innings of three-hit ball to close out a 6-1 win for Toronto.

The teams came right back the next afternoon, with Bud Black getting the ball for Kansas City against Key for Toronto. The Royals got on the board in the third when Buddy Biancalana singled and Willie Wilson homered. They added another run in the fourth when Daryl Motley walked and scored on a double by Jim Sundberg.

Toronto started to come back in the fourth when George Brett committed an error and Johnson made it hurt with an RBI double. In the bottom of the sixth the Jays tied it. With two outs, Black hit Bell with a pitch, and after a Johnson single, a wild pitch moved both runners into scoring position, Barfield cleaned up with a two-run single.

In the bottom of the eighth, the Blue Jays increased the pressure on the Royals, as Lloyd Moseby singled, stole second and took third on an errant throw. Bell's sacrifice fly put Toronto three outs from a win.

But KC answered with a home run from Pat Sheridan to tie it up, and in the top of the 10th they took the lead on a manufactured run of their own. Wilson singled, stole second and scored on a base hit from White.

Now Kansas City was ready to pick up the road split and move the series back home, with closer Dan Quisenberry on the mound. Fernandez quickly started the inning with an infield hit and moved into scoring position on a ground ball out. Moseby singled and the game was tied again. After a bad pickoff throw moved him into scoring position, Quisenberry got Bell to fly out. But Oliver hit an opposite-field single and Moseby brought home the winning run.

All the pressure was on the Royals as they came home for the middle three games. Friday night's Game 3 can only be remembered as "The George Brett Game."

Brett came up in the first inning and homered. In the fourth, he doubled and came around to score on productive outs by Hal McRae and White. Everything was going smoothly for the Royals' staff ace, Cy Young winner Bret Saberhagen, as he took a 2-0 lead into the fifth inning.

Then it all got away from Saberhagen. After Whitt started the inning with a single, Barfield tied the game with a home run. With one out, Garcia doubled, Moseby singled and Mulliniks homered. In the blink of an eye, the Cy Young winner was out, the Blue Jays were ahead 5-2 and Toronto was in complete command of this series.

Sundberg got one run back with a home run in the fifth. One inning later it was Brett's time again. After Wilson singled, Brett hit a game-tying home run. Then in the eighth, he singled and was bunted up by McRae. With two outs, Steve Balboni singled to center and the Royals had the lead.

Steve Farr had come out of the bullpen for Saberhagen in the fifth and Farr closed the game—appropriately enough the final out was a pop fly gloved by Brett. The ALCS was competitive again.

It was a Liebrandt-Stieb rematch in Game 4, in an era when pitchers often went on three days' rest in the postseason. Each team missed a scoring chance early and the pitchers got settled in. It was scoreless in the sixth, when Lonnie Smith led off the Royal half of the frame with a walk. Wilson singled and Brett was intentionally walked. McRae then drew a walk to force in a run.

There was still no one out, and Kansas City and the chance to open the game up. But Sheridan popped out, White hit into a double play and it stayed a one-run game. And the missed chance would come back to haunt the Royals.

In the top of the ninth, Garcia drew a leadoff walk and Moseby followed by ripping a double into right field and the game was tied. Quisenberry was summoned, but quickly gave up a single to Bell and Oliver then slashed his own double to right. It was 3-1 and Toronto closer Tom Henke walked a couple KC batters in the bottom of the ninth but was able to close the win.

A late Sunday afternoon start saw Toronto aim to bring the World Series north of the border for the first time. Key was on the mound, while Kansas City answered with a talented young lefty of their own in Danny Jackson. And Jackson was dominant when his team needed him most.

Kansas City got a run in the first when Lonnie Smith doubled and eventually scored on a RBI groundout by Brett. They got another in the second when White beat out a bunt, took third on a Balboni single and scored on McRae's sac fly. Then Jackson took over.

Toronto threatened in the fifth, getting runners on second and third with one out. But a Fernandez groundout failed to pick up a run and Jackson escaped. The Jays also got second and third in the sixth, this time with two outs. Jackson got Whitt, then ripped through the next nine hitters in order to close the 2-0 shutout.

The Blue Jays were still in good shape, with two games at home at the old Exhibition Stadium ahead. The series resumed Tuesday night with Kansas City sending out young Mark Gubicza, while Toronto went to Doyle Alexander, the Game 3 loser to try and clinch.

Both teams struck quickly. Wilson and Brett drew first-inning walks and McRae ripped an RBI single. Toronto answered right back with a Garcia double, a Moseby single and even though Mulliniks hit into a double play, Garcia scored through the back door.

Kansas City got the lead in the third, again keyed by Wilson and McRae, who singled and doubled, and the score was 2-2. And again, Toronto had an answer. Fernandez drilled a one-out double, took third on a wild pitch and Moseby picked up the run with a productive ground ball out.

Brett took over again in the fifth with a solo home run. In the sixth, after a Sundberg walk was followed by a sac bunt, consecutive doubles from Biancalana and Lonnie Smith made it 5-2. In between the two RBI hits, Alexander was removed.

Toronto again came back in the sixth, as Moseby singled and Upshaw walked, bringing the tying run to the plate with one out. Gubicza was pulled and Black came out of the bullpen. Johnson greeted him with an RBI single and a wild pitch moved the tying runs to second and third. Black then got Bell to pop out, perhaps the biggest out of the Royal season to date.

After escaping the sixth with the score still 5-3, Black settled in and closed out the remainder of the game with shutout relief. We were going to a decisive Game 7 on Wednesday night, and it would be the aces—Stieb and Saberhagen on the mound. At the risk of sounding clichéd, it's tough to get much better than that.

The ace-on-ace storyline took a hit when Saberhagen had to leave after three innings. He was hit in the hand when trying to field a comebacker, and Liebrandt had to come on.

Sundberg had never been known for his hitting prowess, but he became a Royal legend on this night. In the second, after Sheridan bunted his way on and moved up to second, Sundberg hit a two-out RBI single. It was 2-1 in the sixth when he came through even more dramatically.

Stieb lost his control early in the inning, walking Brett, hitting McRae with a pitch and walking Balboni. But with two outs, the Blue Jay ace was in position to escape. Sundberg came up and crushed a pitch to center. It stayed in the park, but it cleared the bases. Sundberg was on third with a triple. White tacked on an add-on run with a single. It was 6-1 and all but over.

There were no more pushbacks from Toronto. Liebrandt pitched 5 2/3 innings, the game ended 6-2 and Kansas City had the American League pennant. Brett was an easy choice for ALCS MVP.

The good news for Toronto fans is that their team was far from done competing on the October stage. The bad news is this isn't the last time they would get their heart broken before finally finishing the job.

1986

The 1986 Toronto Blue Jays were facing an unexpected transition. Bobby Cox departed to become the general manager at Atlanta. Toronto turned to Jimmy Williams. While the Blue Jays were still a good team in '86, it ended up being a season that had all the hallmarks of a hangover year.

The outfield was widely regarded as the best in baseball. Even allowing for an off-year from Lloyd Moseby in center, the stars at the corner spots still had huge years. George Bell hit 31 homers and drove in 108 runs. Jesse Barfield bashed 40 home runs and drove in 108 runs of his own. Bell and Barfield finished 4-5 in the final MVP voting.

Bell and Barfield carried an offense with a number of players having years that, while respectable, showed signs of slippage. First baseman Willie Upshaw had a .341 OBP and stole 23 bases, but saw his power disappear. Damaso Garcia at second had long been a good hitter for average, but his lack of patience at the plate became more apparent when the hits stopped coming.

Rance Mulliniks played third. Like Upshaw, his .340 OBP was good enough, but slugging percentage fell off dramatically. The same went for 38-year-old DH Cliff Johnson, whose .355 OBP couldn't mask lower power numbers. Tony Fernandez stole 25 bases, but the shortstop didn't have a great year with the bat.

Ernie Whitt delivered some power to the alleys with a .448 slugging percentage. But all told, more players underperformed than not.

All of which makes it an even bigger tribute to Bell and Barfield that the Blue Jays still finished second in the American League in runs scored.

But the pitching staff suffered from similar problems—individual seasons that weren't bad, but not quite good enough—without having a similar solution. Jimmy Key and Jim Clancy each won 14 games with ERAs in the high 3s. Tom Henke saved 25 games in the bullpen, but the 3.35 ERA was a little high.

Doyle Alexander and Joe Johnson did part-time duty in the rotation, and ended with ERAs of 4.46 and 3.89 respectively. John Cerutti clocked in at 4.15 in a mix of starting and relief work.

The man who would normally have taken this staff and lifted it to a higher level was having a bad year. Dave Stieb was usually the ace. Not in 1986, when his ERA jumped to 4.74 and he finished 7-12.

Jim Acker was the only pitcher who had a big year for the '86 Jays. The middle reliever worked 157 innings and posted a 1.72 ERA. He appeared on a couple of Cy Young ballots. A great season to be sure, but had anyone told Jimmy Williams that Acker would be his best pitcher, the rookie skipper would have known that some rocky sledding was ahead. Toronto ended up seventh in the 14-team American League for staff ERA.

The Blue Jays played poorly in the season's first two months. An ALCS rematch with the Kansas City Royals ended up with four losses in six games. Five games with the eventual AL West champ California Angels ended with three more defeats. The results against weaker fare were no better. By Memorial Day, Toronto was 20-24, in last place and staring at a nine-game deficit in the AL East.

Boston was out in front of the pack. After Toronto took an early June series from Detroit to get back on their feet, the Jays hosted the Red Sox for a three-game series. This was the chance to start making a move.

Stieb delivered a vintage performance on Monday night, winning 5-1 behind three hits from Fernandez. Toronto then came out on Tuesday and jumped ahead 3-0.

But the Jays missed repeated opportunities and went just 1-for-7 with runners in scoring position (RISP). The Red Sox eventually tied it up and finally beat Toronto 4-3 in ten innings. A similar lack of opportunistic hitting plagued the Jays in the Wednesday night finale, although admittedly facing Roger Clemens was the bigger problem. Toronto went 1-for-9 with RISP, wasting a good outing from Alexander in a 2-1 loss.

The Blue Jays got back on their feet though. Over the next 17 games, all against AL East opponents, Toronto went 12-5. They moved up to fourth place. Even though the deficit was still 9 ½ games, another series with Boston was at hand.

A four-game set in Fenway Park opened up on the final day of June. Behind another three-hit game from Fernandez, the Blue Jays had leads of 6-3 in the fifth and 9-5 in the sixth. But as those scores indicate, Clancy was far from comfortable on the mound. Dennis Lamp eventually came on in relief, but couldn't hold the lead. The Red Sox pulled even and eventually won 10-9 in extra innings.

Alexander pitched on Tuesday night and this time Boston was all over him. The Jays were staring at a 7-1 hole by the third inning. Behind another big night from Fernandez, three more hits, they made it respectable. But the final still ended up with a 9-7 loss.

This series was already a disappointment and was shaping up to be a complete disaster as Clemens took the mound on Wednesday night. Clemens, in his first breakout year in the major leagues, had a 14-0 record coming in and was the talk of baseball. Toronto trailed 2-1 in the eighth.

Finally, someone got to The Rocket. Mulliniks doubled and Bell tied up the game with a single. He eventually came around on a sac fly. The Blue Jays handed the eventual Cy Young and MVP winner his first loss of the season and had survived. They won the finale 8-5 with Mulliniks and Barfield each homering twice.

But losing four of the seven June games with the Red Sox was a missed chance. The Blue Jay record was up to 47-43 by the All-Star break, but they were still 10 ½ games off the pace.

Toronto took three out of four in California out of the break and that triggered a strong late summer. Playing a schedule heavy on the AL West, the Blue Jays went 26-15. By Labor Day, they were up to second place and had closed to within 2 ½ games of the Red Sox. The Boston fan base, not known for being cool under pressure prior to 2004, was in a panic. And Toronto would get six games against the division leader down the stretch.

It all added up to drama. But that's not what happened. Toronto split six games with weak teams in the White Sox and Indians. The Jays hosted a competitive Yankee team and lost three straight. Meanwhile, the Red Sox got hot again. By the time the head-to-head games began, the Blue Jays were ten games back and all but finished.

The final record ended up 86-76. Toronto finished fourth in the AL East and sixth overall in the American League. Was it a playoff season by the more lenient standards of today? Not by those rankings, although you could look at the Jays' record being tied for ninth overall and say they were at least playoff-caliber.

That's an interesting discussion for history. In the moment, Toronto had taken a decided step back.

1987

It started with pitching for the '87 Blue Jays and the rotation was built around three workhorse starters. Key made 36 starts and delivered a 17-8 record with a 2.76 ERA. Clancy went to the mound 37 times, finishing 15-11 with a 3.54 ERA. Stieb went 13-9 with a 4.09 ERA in 31 starts.

Jimmy Williams had to piece together the rest of the rotation, but had a solid bullpen to fall back on. Henke nailed down 34 saves—very good in a period where there were still a lot of complete games by starters—and did it with a 2.49 ERA. Mark Eichorn worked 127 innings and put up a 3.17 ERA.

It all added up to the best staff ERA in the American League and the offense wasn't far behind, ranking third in the AL in runs scored. The attack was led by Bell, who hit 47 home runs, drove

in 134 runs, had a stat line of .352 on-base percentage/.605 slugging percentage and was voted the American League MVP.

Moseby's stat line was .358/.473, he drove in 96 runs and scored 106 more. Barfield had one of the best arms in the game and also hit 28 home runs. Whitt had a good year at age 35, slugging .455 and a young hitter in Fred McGriff came up and hit 20 home runs with a .376 OBP. Fernandez posted a .379 OBP.

There were weak spots in the lineup to be sure—Upshaw and Iorg on the right side of the infield didn't hit well, and third baseman Kelly Gruber was going through growing pains in his second year. But Williams got valuable contributions off the bench.

Mulliniks had a stat line of .371/.500 in nearly 400 plate appearances. The Jays gave almost 200 at-bats to a young power hitter named Cecil Fielder and he popped 14 home runs. Rick Leach, a former college quarterback at Michigan, gave the Jays a .371 OBP in 224 plate appearances.



Toronto started the season off steady and on Memorial Day they were 24-17, three games back of the New York Yankees. From May 29 to June 14 they got hot, going 14-2 and sweeping the Yankees three straight in the Bronx, outscoring them 22-3.

But the Jays turned around and lost home series to Milwaukee and Detroit and got a return sweep handed to them by the Yanks. Toronto was back to three games out at the All-Star break.

The late summer period was one of great consistency. Over a stretch of 15 series, Toronto won nine, split four and only lost two. They never won more than four in a row, but by Labor Day they were sitting on an 82-54 record. New York was fading and

five games back. Detroit emerged as the rival in this division race, just a half-game out.

The Blue Jays made a key acquisition for the pitching staff on August 31. Mike Flanagan had a Cy Young Award on his resume and plenty of big-game experience with Baltimore in the years from 1979-83 when the Orioles won two pennants, a World Series title and were regularly in the division race. Flanagan made seven starts for Toronto and gave them a 2.37 ERA.

The Blue Jays and Tigers would end the season with the two best records in all of baseball and they waged a great September battle. Toronto was still a half-game up on September 27 when the second-to-last weekend of the season arrived. Detroit was in town for a four-game set and on the final weekend the Blue Jays were making a return trip to Tiger Stadium. The AL East would be settled head-to-head.

Toronto jumped Detroit workhorse Jack Morris for four runs in the third inning of the opener, the key hit being a two-run single from Whitt. Those runs stood up for a 4-3 win, but they came at a cost—Fernandez was injured and lost for the rest of the season.

The Jays trailed Friday's game 2-0 in the ninth inning, but Manny Lee's two-run triple tied it and he scored the winning run on an error. On Saturday, the Blue Jays rallied three different times, from deficits of 3-0, 7-3 and 9-7, ultimately winning the game on a bases-loaded walk.

Toronto was 3 ½ games up and even playing mediocre baseball for the last eight days would be enough. What followed was a combination of three factors—a difficult schedule, the loss of key players—Fernandez already out and Whitt would go down by Tuesday of the final week—and a plain-old collapse.

It didn't look that way in the Sunday finale against Detroit. Bell's RBI single in the first inning gave the Jays a quick 1-0 lead and Clancy made it stand up until the ninth inning. The Tigers, fighting for their lives, scored a run to tie it and took the lead on a home run in the 11th inning. Barfield answered with a two-out RBI that further extended the game, but Toronto ultimately lost 3-2 in 13 innings.

They had still done everything that could be reasonably expected, taking three of four on their home field and holding a 2 ½ game lead with a week to go. The Brewers came to town next and though they weren't in contention, this was a hot baseball team. Milwaukee ended up with the best record in the majors after the All-Star break and their ultimate 91-71 record would be fourth-best in the game. Paul Molitor's 39-game hitting streak had captured everyone's attention during the summer and they got everyone's attention again by sweeping the Blue Jays.

Detroit didn't distinguish themselves, splitting four at home with Baltimore. But it was enough to reduce Toronto's lead to a single game as they arrived in Tiger Stadium on Friday night.

Lee got the Jays off to a good start, with a three-run blast in the second inning of the opener. But they didn't score again, the game was tied after three and Toronto lost 4-3.

Flanagan was everything Toronto would have asked him to be on Saturday afternoon. He went toe-to-toe with Jack Morris and in a 2-2 game, Flanagan went *eleven innings*. As soon as he came out, Toronto coughed up a run and lost 3-2.

Unbelievably, the team who a week earlier had been three outs from going up 4 ½ games, now needed to win the finale on the road just to force a one-game playoff. Key took the mound and was brilliant, going the distance and allowing only a solo home run. It wasn't enough. The Blue Jays wasted three good scoring opportunities in the first four innings, then went silent for the rest of the game in a 1-0 loss. It was over.

Coming just two years after blowing a 3-1 series lead in the ALCS, this collapse tagged Toronto with the "can't-win-the-big-one" label. The only way to vindicate themselves now was to at least get to a World Series. It's not fair, but they weren't the first team to face this label from the sports media, nor would they be the last.

1988

The Blue Jays of the 1980s were built around one of baseball's premier outfielders, but each starter suffered slippage in 1988. George Bell had a productive year—24 home runs and 97 RBI—by most measurements...but not by the standard of his MVP year in '87. Jesse Barfield in right and Lloyd Moseby simply had mediocre years by any measurement.

Manny Lee at second base and Tony Fernandez at short were a good middle infield and each had respectable on-base percentages in the .330s, but neither were a power threat. Kelly Gruber was decent at third, with a stat line of .328 OBP/.438 slugging percentage. Rance Mulliniks, the veteran DH, had a very nice year with a stat line of .395/.475.



All of that wouldn't have been enough to make up for the off-years by Barfield and Moseby except for one thing. Fred McGriff became a regular at first base. With a stat line of .376/.552 and 34 home runs, McGriff started what would be an excellent major league career and he helped keep the Toronto offense ranked fourth in the American League for runs scored.

The pitching staff was anchored by Dave Stieb, who went 16-8 with a 3.04 ERA. Jimmy Key won 12 games with a 3.29 ERA. But Key was limited to just 21 starts and that was damaging. Mike Flanagan and Jim Clancy, a couple veteran arms that filled out the

rotation, were reliable—they combined for 65 starts—but also had ERAs in the 4s.

Williams looked for answers with spot starts from 23-year-old Todd Stottlemyre and 25-year-old Jeff Musselman. The latter's 15 starts went pretty well, with a 3.18 ERA. Not so much for Stottlemyre, who clocked in at 5.69 in a mix of starting and relief work.

The bullpen was built around closer Tom Henke, who saved 25 games with a 2.91 ERA. Duane Ward, a 24-year-old reliever with a bright future ahead of him, worked over 100 innings and finished with a 3.30 ERA. But Mark Eichorn and 25-year-old David Wells were mediocre in filling out the pen.

Toronto still finished fifth in the 14-team American League for composite ERA. But it took a lot of patchwork from Williams to get them there.

The Blue Jays split their first six games and then hosted the New York Yankees for a four-game set. The Yankees were in an era where they were perennial bridesmaids in the AL East. Suffice it to say, George Steinbrenner wanted more and expectations were high in 1988.

Toronto spotted New York three runs in the first inning of the opener, but quickly responded with six of their own. Gruber went 4-for-6 with two homers and five ribbies. Bell and Moseby had three hits apiece. A display of offensive fireworks ended with a 17-9 win.

But the "9" in that final score was troubling and pitching would be problematic for the balance of the series. Clancy was rocked on Tuesday in a 12-3 loss. Stieb pitched on Wednesday and gave up five runs in the first. Even though the Yanks didn't score again, the damage was done and the Jays lost 5-1. Key was gone by the fifth inning of Thursday afternoon's finale, a 7-3 loss.

Another team with high expectations was the Oakland A's, managed by Tony LaRussa and with young stars named Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire. The A's came to Toronto for a three-game set at the end of April.

Toronto was consistently outplayed throughout the series. They mustered only five singles in a 6-1 loss on Tuesday. A 5-3 loss followed on Wednesday. Stottlemyre was hit hard in the finale while the bats went 0-for-8 with runners in scoring position. A 6-2 loss completed the sweep.

By Memorial Day, the Blue Jays were reeling. The record was 21-28 and they were twelve games back of the Yankees in the AL East.

The early summer months saw the Blue Jays show some signs of life. They won four straight from the Red Sox in Fenway, then took two of three when Boston made the return trip to Canada. Toronto went 4-3 against Detroit.

The Blue Jays pushed their way back to .500 on two different occasions, but Oakland, on their way to the World Series this season, again got in the way and administered an early July sweep. The Blue Jay record at the All-Star break was 42-46. They were in sixth place. They were 11 ½ games back in a division where the Tigers now held the lead.

The late summer would be marked by an AL East contender that had played mediocre baseball for the first half, getting hot and moving to first place. But it would be Boston, rather than Toronto. The Blue Jays did play better, but not enough to really get in the race.

What they did get was some payback against New York, who was starting to struggle. Toronto paid a visit to the Bronx in the first part of August for a three-game set.

Fernandez sparked the lineup in Tuesday night's opener with three hits. Flanagan pitched five manageable innings, and then Ward was brilliant in getting the final twelve outs of a 6-3 win. Key delivered a shutout, a 5-0 win on Wednesday.

On Thursday night, Ernie Whitt homered twice and the Jays led 5-3 in the ninth. Even though Henke coughed up a game-tying home run to Don Mattingly and the game went extras, Toronto still found a way to complete the sweep. In the top of the eleventh, Barfield singled, stole second and then came all the way around on a throwing error.

By Labor Day, the Blue Jays were finally on the right side of .500 with a 69-68 record. They were within 6 ½ games, but in fifth place, there were a lot of teams to leapfrog and not much time to do it in.

To the great credit of Toronto, they didn't mail it in. The Jays won 22 of their final 29 games. That included series wins over Detroit and Boston, who were jousting for first. The Red Sox eventually won the race, but the Blue Jays made them wait. In the final week, when Boston needed one win to clinch. Toronto swept three games in Fenway and scored 27 runs in the process.

The final record was 87-75 and the late surge meant the Blue Jays finished just two games out of first place. They were tied for third in the AL East, tied for fifth in the American League overall and tied for seventh in all of baseball. It was a playoff season by the standards of today.

But that final record doesn't convey that Toronto was never a real contender to win the AL East. This franchise was now at a point where that was the measuring stick.

1989

The pressure was on for the 1989 Toronto Blue Jays. The Jays had to win in 1989 and thought it didn't always look pretty, they returned to the postseason.

Toronto's success was built around having a balanced team, throughout the lineup and with both hitting and pitching. They would rank third in the American League for runs scored in 1989 and fourth in ERA. But first among equals was McGriff.

After a breakout year in '88 established McGriff as one of baseball's top young hitters, the first baseman kept right on rolling in '89. His stat line was .399 on-base percentage/.525 slugging percentage. He ripped 36 home runs and drove in 92 runs.

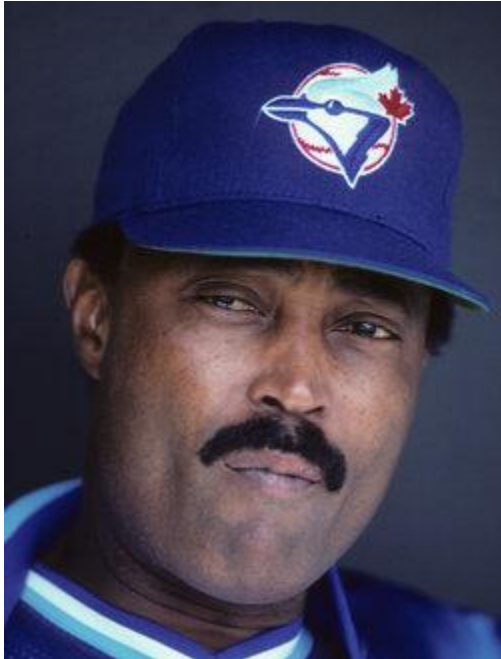
Gruber was another emerging star at third base, slugging .448. Gruber and McGriff carried a lineup that saw declining production from an outfield that had been one of baseball's best for several years.

Bell was still productive, but his decline from elite status was obvious. Moseby had his second straight off year. Barfield continued a decline and was traded by the end of April.

The starting pitching was well-balanced. No one had a dominant year, but the five starters all finished with ERAs in the 3s. John Cerutti had the best ERA, at 3.97. Stieb won 17 games. Flanagan and Key were still reliable lefties. Stottlemyre rounded out the rotation with 18 spot starts. Collectively, these five arms combined to make 145 starts. That's the kind of reliability that stands up well in a long pennant race.

The bullpen was one of the best and deepest Toronto had during this decade. Henke and Ward split closing duties. A 26-year-old David Wells started to come into his own as a middle reliever with a 2.40 ERA. Frank Willis was steady, with a 3.66 ERA.

Jimmy Williams needed a strong start to the season. He got the exact opposite. Toronto started a woeful 12-24. It came as no surprise that a managerial change was made. Cito Gaston was hired.



If any positive can be found in losing two-thirds of your games, it's that almost all of them came outside the AL East and none were against fellow contenders in the division. Toronto crawled to 20-28 by Memorial Day. The AL East, after having been baseball's best division through the 1980s, was starting to get a little soft. The Orioles' 23-22 record was actually good enough for first place, so the Blue Jays were only 4 ½ games out.

Losing three straight to lowly Cleveland didn't exactly usher in the summer on a high note. But the Jays went on to Boston, who had won this division twice in the previous three years and unloaded for thirty runs in a three-game sweep.

That offensive explosion at Fenway started a 13-7 stretch and got Toronto within sniffing distance of .500. But the first matchups with Baltimore did not go well. Flanagan was rocked by his old friends in a 16-6 loss. Cerutti took a hard-luck 2-1 loss and Toronto lost two of three on the road. When Baltimore made a return trip north, Toronto again lost two of three.

By the All-Star break, the Blue Jays were at 42-45 and tied for fourth. With the Orioles starting to pick up the pace, Toronto was seven games out.

The best teams in the American League this season were in the West, specifically the eventual World Series champion Oakland A's and including the California Angels. Toronto's taking four of seven games from these teams out of the break was clearly a good sign. By August 13, the Jays were within 2 ½ games of the lead.

With a 58-59 record, there were eleven teams in the majors who had a better record than Toronto. But only one of those teams, Baltimore, was in the AL East. The Blue Jays, along with the Red Sox and Brewers who had the same record, were still in the hunt with a month and a half left.

It was Toronto who got hot and started playing like a legitimate contender. They ripped off 16 wins in the 20 games leading into Labor Day. By the holiday, they were 74-63 and now in the lead, up a game on Baltimore and five on Boston. Milwaukee had fallen off the pace.

The schedule was soft in the early part of September and Toronto was now playing well enough to take advantage. The Blue Jays won nine of ten against the White Sox, Indians and Twins.

Another series with Cleveland saw Toronto take the opener. Then the Tribe started putting up a fight.

Saturday afternoon's game was tied 2-2. The Blue Jays won it when Bell doubled and then scored on consecutive errors. Another tight pitcher's duel on Sunday, this one 1-1 in the 10th, was decided by an Indian miscue. An error set up McGriff to drive in the winning run.

Toronto's surge pushed their record to 83-67, but Baltimore was starting to play like a legitimate contender as well. The Orioles were still within 2 ½ games of the lead. When the Jays lost consecutive series to the Red Sox and Brewers, that lead was narrowed to a single game entering the final week—and the season would end with a three-game set against Baltimore in Toronto's old Exhibition Stadium.

Both the Jays and Orioles took care of business in the early part of the week. Toronto won two of three from Detroit, while Baltimore did the same against Milwaukee. The Blue Jays were 87-72. The Orioles were 86-73. The final showdown was here.

Stottlemyre took the ball on Friday night and was brilliant. But he was also getting no run support and Toronto trailed 1-0 in the eighth. Mookie Wilson, a veteran of the New York Mets' 1986 championship team and acquired in July for moments like this, singled. Baltimore summoned Gregg Olson, the best closer in the American League for 1989.

McGriff grounded into a force play that removed the speedy Wilson from the bases. Gaston sent in Tom Lawless to run for McGriff. Lawless stole second and then took third on a groundball out. With two outs, a wild pitch tied up the game.

The night stretched to the 11th inning. Manny Lee singled with one out. He moved up to second on a groundout. Moseby, who had delivered so many clutch hits for this organization over the years, did it again, a game-winning base hit.

Toronto needed just one more win and had three chances to do it (allowing for the provision of a Monday playoff game if necessary). But after 1985 and 1987, no one in Toronto was going to get too comfortable.

NBC's Saturday *Game of the Week* was a baseball staple in this era and with all other division races settled, the network focused on Blue Jays-Orioles. And once again, Toronto struggled with the bats and trailed into the eighth inning, this time 3-1.

With Olson having worked almost three innings the night before, the Blue Jays got a crack at the undercard of the Baltimore bullpen. And Toronto took advantage. Two walks set them up. Moseby bunted the tying runs into scoring position. Wilson and McGriff both delivered hits that tied up the game and had Mookie on third.

Bell came to the plate, got a ball in the air and the flyout to right was deep enough to pick up the lead run. Toronto was three outs and Henke got them. When the closer struck out Larry Sheets, the celebration could start.

It wasn't a celebration that could last long. The A's were by far the best team in baseball and they were waiting in the American League Championship Series.

1989 ALCS

Both teams had their aces ready for Game 1 in Oakland, as Dave Stewart went for the A's and Stieb took the ball for the Blue Jays. It was Toronto who struck first, in the top of the second. Bell and Fernandez singled, setting up runners on the corners. Fernandez stole second. Ernie Whitt picked up one run with a sac fly and Nelson Liriano delivered a two-out base hit for a 2-0 lead.

When Oakland met Boston in the 1988 ALCS, the A's consistently answered rallies immediately, and they picked up where they left off a year later. Dave Henderson hit a leadoff home run in the bottom of the second. The score stayed 2-1 until the top of the fourth, when Whitt homered for Toronto.

The A's chipped back in the fifth, when Carney Lansford singled, stole second with two outs and scored when big Dave Parker singled the other way to left field.

One inning later, Mark McGwire hit a leadoff home run and it was tied 3-3. Tony Phillips followed by beating out a bunt and Stieb was removed for reliever Acker, a somewhat curious quick hook given Stieb's status as the ace.

A soft rally ensued. An infield hit and hit batsman loaded the bases. Lansford hit a ground ball to short and it looked like the Jays might get the double play they needed to keep the game 3-3. Instead, Liriano threw it away off the turn, two runs came in and the score was 5-3.

Stewart locked in with the lead and retired the side in both the seventh and eighth, setting up closer Dennis Eckersley to do the same in the ninth. The A's added two insurance runs in the eighth for good measure and took the opener 7-3.

The teams came back right away the following afternoon for a noon start local time. Toronto went to Todd Stottlemire to try and pick up a road win, and Oakland sent Mike Moore to the mound. And once again, it was the Blue Jays who struck first.

In the top of the third, Moseby singled with one out. Mookie Wilson hit a ground ball to first base—not unlike the one he'd hit at Bill Buckner in the iconic moment of the 1986 World Series. This time he got credit for an infield hit, but also got the error, from McGwire. It sent Moseby to third where a ground ball out could pick up the game's first run.

Rickey Henderson was the leadoff hitter for Oakland and began putting his imprint on this series in the fourth. He walked, stole both second and third and scored on a Lansford single. McGwire then doubled to bring home Lansford for a 2-1 lead. In the sixth, Parker homered. After McGwire singled, Stottlemire was pulled for Acker. A ground rule double by Dave Henderson, a sac fly from Ron Hassey and a base hit from Tony Phillips stretched the Oakland lead to 5-1.

The A's got insurance in the seventh in the ultimate manufactured rally. Rickey Henderson walked and stole second. Lansford walked, and Henderson stole third. Lansford stole second, and the errant throw brought Henderson in.

The extra run gave Oakland some breathing room when the Blue Jays rallied in the top of the eighth. Rick Honeycutt had come on from Moore, but allowed a single and two walks to load the bases with none out. Eckersley came on. McGriff hit an RBI and the tying run was at the plate. But George Bell hit into a double play, which brought in a run through the backdoor, but killed the rally. Oakland won 6-3.

Key took his team's season essentially in his hands when he took the mound to face Storm Davis in Game 3 at the Toronto Skydome. It looked like the A's would put this game and series to bed early.

Rickey Henderson and Lansford each walked to start the game, Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire each hit sac flies and it was 1-0. In the third, Rickey Henderson doubled, stole third and scored on a Lansford single. In the fourth, Parker homered and it was 3-0.

In the bottom of the fourth, Toronto answered. Moseby drew a leadoff walk, followed by a Wilson infield hit and McGriff single to load the bases. Bell picked up the team's first run with a sac fly and then Fernandez cleared the bases with a double that tied the game 3-3. Whitt tacked on an RBI single and for the third straight game, Toronto had a lead.

This time, the Blue Jays made it stand up. They scored three more runs in the seventh, again with a Fernandez double being important, this time to start the inning. Acker and Henke combined to close the door and with the 7-3 win this was a series again when the teams returned to the field early Saturday afternoon.

Two veterans, Bob Welch for Oakland and Flanagan for Toronto were on the mound. Each had been a key World Series performer in their younger days, Welch for the Dodgers and Flanagan for the Orioles.

Oakland continued the pattern of the road team scoring first in each game. Walt Weiss doubled with one out in the third, then swiped third base. Rickey Henderson, having already shown his speed, now showed his power. He homered to dead center. Canseco hit a solo blast, and it was 3-0.

Toronto got a run back in the fourth when Fernandez singled, stole second, took third on an infield hit and scored on a ground ball out. But Oakland hit right back in the top of the fifth. With a man aboard, Rickey Henderson homered again. The Blue Jays got a run back in the sixth, the teams traded solo home runs in the seventh, and it looked like Oakland's 6-3 lead was comfortable in the bottom of the eighth.

An infield hit, walk and wild pitch from Honeycutt gave Toronto first and third with one out. Eckersley was summoned. Wilson hit a groundout that scored a run and McGriff singled to cut the lead to 6-5. Bell had a chance to tie or take the lead and he got a hold of one. But it ended

up a deep fly to center, Eckersley slammed the door in the ninth and Oakland's 6-5 win gave them firm command of this series.

Stewart and Stieb returned to the mound on a late Sunday afternoon in Toronto. Rickey Henderson wasted no time in putting pressure on Toronto, as he drew a walk to start the game, stole second and scored on a Canseco single. In third, Rickey ripped an RBI triple. Stieb settled in after that, but Stewart gave no ground and the score was still 2-0 in the seventh.

Dave Henderson drew a walk in the seventh, followed by singles from McGwire and Terry Steinbach. Acker was called on to keep Toronto in the game, but a sac fly and squeeze play pushed over a key run to make it 4-3.

The run was needed, because the Blue Jays didn't roll over. Moseby homered in the eighth. Bell homered to start the ninth to make it 4-2, and Eckersley came on for Stewart. Fernandez singled and stole second. A groundout and sac fly scored the run, but now the Jays were down to their last out. Eckersley closed the door one more time and with the 4-3 win, Oakland had back-to-back American League pennants.

There were several good individual performances from the A's. Lansford went 5-for-11 and drew two walks. Stewart went eight innings in each of his two winning starts. Eckersley saved three games, pitching 5.2 innings and only giving up one run.

But no one dominated this series like Rickey Henderson. He went 6-for-15, drew seven walks, homered twice and stole *eight* bases in five games. He was a deserved selection as the 1989 ALCS MVP. Oakland went on and finished the job and won the World Series. As for Toronto though, they had finally made it back to the postseason.

1990

The 1990 Toronto Blue Jays were cut in the mold of the team's eight-year run from 1984-91, where they were consistently good, but not quite good enough to win it all. The 1990 edition of the Blue Jays competed right to the very end of the regular season before losing a tough AL East race.

Toronto's lineup was anchored by production from the corner infield spots. Gruber, hit 31 home runs, drove in 118 runs and finished fourth in the MVP voting. McGriff at first base was 10th in the MVP vote, although he was the more complete offensive player. McGriff finished with an on-base percentage of .400, slugged .530, hit 35 home runs, drove in 88 runs and scored 91 more.

Gruber and McGriff got help from John Olerud, the 21-year-old designated hitter who finished with a .364 OBP/.430 slugging. Fernandez at short had a .352 OBP. But the Blue Jay lineup had more holes than was customary during this era.

Bell had a bad year. Mookie Wilson was aging, now 34-years-old in center and right fielder Junior Felix was still a little too green at age 22.

Stieb was still the mainstay of the rotation and he won 18 games with a 2.93 ERA. Henke anchored the bullpen, saving 32 games with a 2.17 ERA. But the depth was a problem. Stottlemire was the only pitcher besides Stieb to make 30-plus starts and his ERA was 4.34. Key had a down year, a 4.25 ERA in 27 starts. David Wells was effective, going 11-6 with a 3.14 ERA, but only went to the post 25 times.



Toronto won 11 of their first 17 games and took the lead in an AL East that had no clear dominant team. A trip to Chicago at the end of April brought them down to earth. They lost three straight to the White Sox, who would end up as the second-best team in the American League behind the Oakland A's. The lowlight of the weekend series came on Sunday when Key was knocked out after three innings in a 10-3 loss.

When Memorial Day arrived, the Jays were only 24-22, but this year in the AL East they were good enough for second place and just a ½ game behind a Milwaukee Brewers team that no one took seriously.

Milwaukee indeed fell by the wayside in the early summer, while Toronto and the Boston Red Sox picked up the slack and separated themselves from the rest of the division. The Blue Jays ripped off an 11-2 streak in early June and led the Red Sox by a half-game, with two series against their rivals looming.

The Jays and Red Sox split two in the SkyDome. After losing the opener, Toronto rebounded with an 11-0 rout behind Stieb. It was a four-game set in Fenway a week later that was the problem. Stieb and Key each struggled and lost their starts. Toronto understandably lost to Roger Clemens and less understandably was shut down by Wes Gardner. They lost all four games, although they were able to rebound and close the margin back to within a half-game by the All-Star break.

But the head-to-head problems against Boston weren't going away. In late August, the Red Sox came north of the border and took three out of four—all three Blue Jay losses were shutouts and all were close, as Toronto only gave up four runs combined in the three games. It was the low point of a sub-.500 August, and when the Jays were 6 ½ off the pace on Labor Day, their prospects looked bleak.

In early September, Toronto started to gather themselves. They swept Chicago, while Boston was getting swept by Oakland, and the lead was cut to 4 ½ games. Toronto then took advantage of a softer schedule and took five of seven from the Kansas City Royals and Baltimore Orioles. The Red Sox, meanwhile, were beaten up by the White Sox and by September 16 the margin in the AL East was down to a single game.

Toronto kept surging and swept a bad New York Yankees team in Skydome, while Boston was losing a series in Baltimore. The Blue Jays moved into first place by a game and the race was still tied with six games to go. The Jays and Red Sox met for a three-game weekend set in Fenway.

Stieb got the ball in the Friday opener and immediately fell behind 4-0. Toronto tied the game, but two errors by Gruber put Boston back ahead. When Junior Felix hit a two-run shot to give the Jays a 6-5 lead and Henke on the way in, Toronto was looking good. But the closer coughed up the lead and they lost 7-6.

Stottlemyre was rocked on Saturday, falling behind Clemens 7-0. The Jays got five runs in the ninth, but the 7-5 loss wasn't as close as it appeared. The bats salvaged Sunday's finale. Felix singled and stole second to jumpstart a three-run rally in the second. Felix later homered and Toronto won 10-5. But they needed help in the final three games of the year.

The Blue Jays were in Baltimore, while the Red Sox hosted Chicago, so help was possible. But Wells couldn't hold a 3-1 lead on Monday and Toronto lost another game in the standings. They survived on Tuesday behind a brilliant outing from lefty Bud Black, the current Colorado Rockies manager. McGriff hit a two-run homer to break up a 1-1 tie in the ninth, while Boston was losing. On the final day of the regular season, the Blue Jays were breathing.

But the pennant drive fell short. Toronto was tied 1-1 when word came that Boston had clinched the AL East with a thrilling win over Chicago. The Blue Jays lost their finale seven minutes later and the season was over.

1991

The Blue Jays did a major personnel shakeup. They dealt Fred McGriff to the San Diego Padres. Included in that deal was shortstop Tony Fernandez. They also traded a good young outfielder, Junior Felix, in a separate deal with the California Angels. Toronto parted ways with George Bell and reliable starting pitcher Bud Black.

But the players they got back were pretty good too—Roberto Alomar was a future Hall of Famer at second base. Joe Carter was a multi-talented offensive threat in the outfield. Each came in the McGriff deal. Toronto acquired centerfielder Devon White in exchange for Felix. All of the new players would eventually deliver historic October moments for Toronto.

Carter hit 33 home runs and finished with 108 RBI in 1991. Alomar, age 23, posted respectable numbers of a .354 on-base percentage/.436 slugging percentage. White was similar at .342/.455. John Olerud was a good young hitter at first base, putting up a .353/.438 stat line in 1991.

But there were also problems. Kelly Gruber experienced a sharp decline at third base, the bench was weak and Toronto finished 11th in the American League in runs scored. What saved them was a deep and balanced pitching staff.

Jimmy Key, David Wells and Todd Stottlemyre all won at least 15 games and finished with ERAs in the 3s. Juan Guzman, a talented 24-year-old, won 10 games and his ERA was 2.99. Tom Candiotti threw his knuckleball and in 19 starts posted a 2.98 ERA. Tom Henke continued to be one of baseball's most consistent closers. Mike Timlin and Duane Ward were effective setup relievers. The Jays might not have had an individual Cy Young contender, but they had the best pitching staff in the American League.

Toronto split six games with Boston in April and both teams again moved to the top of the division. The Blue Jays reached Memorial Day just a half-game off the pace with a record of 25-19. In June, the Red Sox started to slump and Toronto got hot. They went on a 14-3 streak going into the All-Star break and took a 5 ½ game lead.

August was the Blue Jays' turn to slump. They lost 12 of 19 games against AL East rivals in the Red Sox, Detroit Tigers and Milwaukee Brewers, all of whom were in the same division prior to 1994. By Labor Day, the Tigers were within 2 ½ games and the Red Sox had come off the mat from ten games back to close back within five.

The Blue Jays continued to muddle along for much of September. Detroit played themselves out of it, but Boston kept surging and closed to within a half-game of the lead with two weeks still to play. All the momentum was with the Red Sox.

Toronto started to move the pendulum back the other way by taking two of three in California, while Boston lost a series in Baltimore. Breathing room was regained and the penultimate weekend then proved decisive. While the Jays took two of three at home from a Minnesota Twins team that had already clinched the AL West, the Red Sox lost three straight in Milwaukee. The lead was back up to 3 ½ games and there were only six to play.

On Wednesday of the season's final week, Toronto trailed California 5-4 in the ninth inning. Facing American League saves leader Bryan Harvey, they rallied. White beat out an infield hit and scored the tying run on an error. Carter's RBI single won it and a third AL East title in seven years was clinched.

For the third time, Toronto would get a crack in the American League Championship Series. This time it was the Minnesota Twins standing their way.

1991 ALCS

The Twins were the opposite of the Blue Jays in terms of track record, in ways both good and bad. Minnesota had finished in last place a year earlier and was nowhere close to matching Toronto's consistency. But when the Twins did get into the playoffs in 1987, they won it all. .

On a Tuesday night in the old Metrodome, Jack Morris took the ball for Minnesota against Candiotti. The Twins got after Candiotti right away. Dan Gladden and Chuck Knoblauch led off the first inning with singles. A one-out sacrifice fly moved Gladden to third and Knoblauch stole second. Chili Davis then delivered a two-out RBI single for a 2-0 lead.

Minnesota kept it going in the second. Shane Mack beat out an infield hit, stole second and scored on a base hit from Greg Gagne. Gladden and Knoblauch each singled again and it was 4-0. In the bottom of the third, Davis walked, stole second and scored on a two-out RBI double from Mack. Candiotti was gone and the lead was 5-0.

Toronto got great relief work from Wells and Timlin, and their offense started chipping back. They got a run in the fourth. With one out in the sixth, Devon White, Alomar, Olerud and Gruber all singled in succession. Suddenly the lead was cut to 5-4 and there were runners on first and second. Minnesota manager Tom Kelly summoned Carl Willis from the bullpen.

Willis retired all seven batters he faced and got the ball into the hands of closer Rick Aguilera, who got the final four outs and held on to the 5-4 lead and the Game 1 win.

The Blue Jays turned to Guzman for a Game 2 they realistically needed to win. They got him early support, touching Twins' starter Kevin Tapani for a first-inning run. Devon White started that rally and he did it again in the third, when a leadoff double started that rally that ended when Gruber hit a two-run single to right.

Guzman pitched around some trouble in the first when he walked a couple guys and allowed a run in the third when a wild pitch let Knoblauch get to second where he scored on a base hit by Puckett. But otherwise, the 3-1 lead stood into the sixth when walks again got him in trouble.

Knoblauch and Chili Davis each drew free passes. With two outs, Puckett singled to score a run. Guzman was out and Toronto manager Cito Gaston went to his closer early. Tom Hehne came on to end that inning and the Twins never threatened again. The Jays touched Tapani for two more runs in the seventh to secure their 5-2 win.

Homefield advantage had been vital to Minnesota in their 1987 World Series title run, as they had gone 6-0 in the Metrodome. The Game 2 loss in this ALCS meant they had to get at least one win on the road. It turned out, the Twins would do a lot more than that.

It didn't look like the weekend was going to be a Twins-fest when Carter hit a solo home run in the first inning of Friday night's Game 3. And then that was followed up by a walk, an infield hit and an RBI double from Candy Maldonado. It was 2-0, but Minnesota's 20-game winner Scott Erickson turned out to be done giving up runs for the night.

Jimmy Key pitched well for the Blue Jays and the 2-0 lead stood to the fifth when Mack tripled and scored. In the sixth, Knoblauch doubled and Puckett picked him up with a single that tied the game. It stayed 2-2 into extra innings and both starters were out.

Timlin was on for Toronto facing Minnesota third baseman Mike Pagliarulo. After a disappointing season following his free agent signing, Pagliarulo made up for it. He homered to right. Aguilera closed the game out and Minnesota had reclaimed the home field.

The pressure was on the Blue Jays for Saturday night with Morris on the mound. Toronto threatened early. They got on the run in the second, and one inning later, put runners on second

and third with one out. Carter was at the plate. Morris got the big strikeout, escaped the inning and the rest of the evening went Minnesota's way.

Puckett homered off Stottlemyre to start the fourth and the game was tied. Davis hit a one-out double. With two outs, Mack walked and Pagliarulo singled in a run. After a hit batsman, Gladden ripped a two-run single, it was 4-1 and the rout was on. Minnesota added two more in the sixth. Morris went eight strong innings. The final score was 9-3.

Candiotti would get a chance to redeem himself in a must-win Game 5 in the late afternoon on Sunday. It didn't begin well. Puckett homered in the first. In the second, Davis singled and then moved up to third as a couple knuckleballs got away. A base hit from Mack made it 2-0 and the Twins put runners on second and third with one out. Candiotti got Greg Gagne to pop up and kept his team in the game.

The Toronto offense awoke against Tapani in the third. Singles from Manny Lee, White and Alomar brought in one run. Carter doubled to tie it. Olerud drove in a third run with a productive out and the Blue Jays had the lead. That lead was extended to 5-2 in the fourth. After two were out, Lee and Mookie Wilson singled, putting runners on the corners. Wilson stole second and Alomar drove in both runners with a single.

In the top of the sixth, Mack and Pagliarulo each singled, and Candiotti was removed for Timlin. Gagne popped up, but a Toronto error let a run in. Knoblauch blooped a double to right, two more runs scored and the game was tied.

Ward came on for Timlin and the 5-5 score held until the eighth. Ward got the first two Minnesota batters out. Then the final blow came from the Twins. Gladden singled and Knoblauch walked. A base hit from Puckett brought in Gladden with the lead run. The throw to the plate let Knoblauch and Puckett each move up a base. Kent Hrbek went the other way with a single to left center that provided two insurance runs.

It was 8-5 and all but over. Willis handled the Toronto half of the eighth with ease. Aguilera closed out the ninth, with Alomar's fly ball to Gladden triggering the celebration in the Twin Cities.

Puckett was named 1991 ALCS MVP. He went 9-for-21, homered twice and drove in five runs, including the one that clinched the pennant. Also worthy of mention are Knoblauch, who batted .350 for the series and the relief work of Willis and Aguilera. They combined to pitch 8.2 IP of shutout ball and were vital to three of the four wins.

Toronto was hurt most by Candiotti not pitching deep into either one of his starts. Offensively, Olerud, Lee and Maldonado combined to go 7-for-55. Alomar was the bright spot, with his nine hits for the series.

Good things were ahead for both franchises. For Minnesota, that was immediate—they won a thrilling seven-game World Series from the Atlanta Braves and had their second championship in five years. Toronto wouldn't have to wait very long for their vindication.

1992

Toronto went and got veteran help in the offseason. They signed 40-year-old Dave Winfield to DH and the move paid off. Winfield finished with a stat line of .377 on-base percentage/.491 slugging percentage. An even splashier move was the signing of 37-year-old starting pitcher Jack Morris. The ace of the Minnesota Twins staff that had ousted Toronto in the '91 ALCS and an eventual World Series hero, Morris' reputation was the exact opposite of his new team—that of someone who always found a way to win.

Morris' 1992 season was, in that regard, typical. He wasn't dominant by any means, with a 4.04 ERA. But he was reliable, working 240 innings. And he found ways to get it done, posting 21 wins. Morris was one of those rare pitchers for whom the win totals were consistently better than his ERAs.

But it was the offense that carried the Blue Jays through the regular season and the best player was Alomar. Embarking on a Hall of Fame career, Alomar's stat line was .405/.427. He was a key table-setter for power hitters that included—in addition to Winfield—Carter, who hit 34 home runs and drove in 119 runs. Candy Maldonado popped 20 more homers. Toronto ended up second in the American League in runs scored.

The pitching staff was hindered by lack of depth. Henke and Ward were good relievers, but the bullpen was otherwise short on quality arms. Key ended up 13-13 with a 3.53 ERA. The best starter in the rotation was Guzman, who won 16 games and posted a 2.64 ERA. But the search for pitching help would define Toronto's in-season trade pursuits.

The Jays won 15 of their first 20 games and jumped out to an early lead in the AL East, but a slump at the end of May let the Baltimore Orioles move into more or less a dead heat. For the last part of May and almost all of June, the Blue Jays and Orioles stayed within a game of each other either way. Toronto's 9-4 spurt as the first half wound down nudged their lead out to four games at the All-Star break.

Mediocrity settled over the Blue Jays in the late summer. They lost a series to Baltimore and lost two series to the Milwaukee Brewers, who were starting to make a move in the standings. The late summer slowdown added urgency to the need for pitching and Toronto made the kind of big move you would expect from an organization in a win-or-bust year. They acquired 29-year-old David Cone. He would make eight starts for the Blue Jays down the stretch and deliver a 2.55 ERA in those games. It was essential stability that the Jays needed to hold off a hot challenger.

And the Brewers were coming on. I lived in Milwaukee during this season and still recall the sense of destiny that the city had, as their own great Hall of Famer, Robin Yount, closed in on his 3,000th hit and the team improbably overachieved. The Brewers were within striking distance on Labor Day, at 5 ½ games out and the Orioles were still nipping at Toronto's heels, a game and a half back.

Baltimore faded, but Milwaukee didn't. Toronto showed that their 1992 team was made of different stuff than previous years though, calmly playing consistent baseball in the face of the surge. In the first seven series after Labor Day, the Blue Jays won five and split the other two. It was enough to keep their lead at two games going into the final weekend of the regular season.

Friday night's home game with Detroit was a microcosm of the season, as the bats made up for a shaky bullpen. Alomar, Maldonado and catcher Pat Borders all homered in building a 6-1 lead. Then they hung on for an 8-7 win. Milwaukee beat Oakland the same night, so the margin was still at two games with two to play.

Guzman took the ball on Saturday and was brilliant, going eight innings and allowing just one hit. Henke came on in the ninth to protect a 3-0 lead and managed to make it interesting—he allowed a run and had the bases loaded with two outs. Ward entered the game and got the final out, getting Dan Gladden to pop up. Toronto had its fourth AL East title in eight years.

Oakland had returned to the top of the AL West and this would be an anticipated ALCS showdown. And there was a feeling throughout baseball that Toronto's time might finally be here.

1992 ALCS

Morris and Oakland's Dave Stewart were the very definition of big-game pitchers for their era and they squared off in the series opener on Wednesday night. By virtue of the rotation system that determined home field advantage, the ALCS would open at Toronto's Skydome.

The A's got to Morris in the second inning. Harold Baines singled, and that was followed by home runs from Mark McGwire and Terry Steinbach for a 3-0 lead. The Blue Jays chipped back in the middle innings on solo blasts from Pat Borders and Winfield, but Oakland still held a 3-2 lead as the game went to the eighth.

With two outs in the bottom of the inning, Toronto got a double from Winfield. Stewart was removed for Jeff Russell, but the setup man couldn't stop Olerud from lining a single to center to tie the game. Morris was still in for Toronto, but Baines got him one more time—with a home run down the right field line. This time the lead stood up and the 4-3 win gave the A's early control of the series. If Toronto fans were saying "Here we go again", they could not be blamed.

Cone was acquired for the type of virtual must-win start he got in Thursday night's Game 2. Cone squared off with Oakland's Mike Moore and both pitchers quickly settled in.

The game was scoreless until the fifth. The A's had a chance to break through when they put runners on second and third. But a couple big strikeouts from Cone kept the scoreless tie intact. Until the Blue Jays came to the plate. Gruber hit a two-run blast for the game's first runs. Two innings later, Gruber doubled and scored to give Cone a 3-0 lead.

Cone was removed in the ninth after allowing a leadoff triple to Ruben Sierra. Henke came on. Baines' RBI single brought the tying run to the plate in the person of McGwire. The big first

baseman hit the ball well, but got underneath it just enough to keep it in the park. The deep fly out to right was Oakland's best shot in a 3-1 loss.

The A's still had three games coming up home and the first one was a noon start local time on Saturday afternoon. Oakland sent postseason veteran Ron Darling to face Guzman.

An early error by A's third baseman Carney Lansford resulted in a Blue Jay run and fourth-inning home run by Alomar nudged Toronto out to a 2-0 lead. Oakland made their first move in the bottom of the fourth. Sierra doubled to start a two-run rally that included another key base hit from Baines. The game was tied 2-2, the bases were loaded and there was nobody out.

Mike Bordick lifted a fly ball to right. McGwire tagged up from third. Carter threw him out at the plate. Toronto had turned back a potentially big inning and then immediately got a solo blast from Maldonado to start the fifth.

The starting pitchers each made it through six innings and the score stayed 3-2 into the seventh. An error by Bordick opened the door to a two-run triple by Manny Lee and the Jays were up 5-2. The A's countered with three singles, wrapped around a walk and stolen base by Rickey Henderson to get the two runs back and make it 5-4.

Russell came on in the eighth and for the second time in this series, struggled. He walked Winfield and with the 40-year-old later on third base, Russell uncorked a wild pitch that allowed the run. It proved to be a big run, because Oakland got something going against Henke in their own half of the eighth, getting runners on first and third with one out.

Lansford was at the plate and when he popped out, it looked like Henke would escape. But Sierra blooped a single to make it a 6-5 game and gave the red-hot Baines a chance to be a hero. Henke got Baines to ground out. Toronto added one more insurance run off Oakland's MVP closer Dennis Eckersley in the ninth and won 7-5.

The two teams came back again at noon on Sunday. Morris took the ball on short rest for Toronto, while Oakland turned to veteran Bob Welch. And the Blue Jay offense seemed to pick up where they left off, with a home run from Olerud staking Morris to a 1-0 lead in the second inning.

But in the bottom of the third, the A's bats got rolling. They peppered Morris for five hits, along with two walks and rang up five runs. They were in position to get more before Bordick grounded into a double play that kept the score 5-1.

Oakland rallied again in the fourth and chased Morris with runners on the corners and one out. Todd Stottlemyre came out of the bullpen and delivered for the Jays. He got Sierra on a weak grounder that couldn't bring in the run and then retired Baines.

Sierra ripped a two-out double in the sixth and came around to score. The lead was stretched to 6-1 and stayed that way until the eighth. Roberto Alomar led off the Toronto frame with a double. Welch was removed. It was simply up to the Oakland bullpen, so reliable all year, to get the final

six outs and put the ball back in Stewart's hands the following afternoon. Even with Russell ineffective, Oakland manager Tony LaRussa had other options and he went to Jeff Parrett.

It didn't help. Carter and Winfield each got hits and LaRussa was forced to go to Eckersley early. Olerud and Maldonado greeted Eck with base hits. Suddenly the score was 6-4, there were runners on first and second and still nobody out. Eckersley shut it down from there, and celebrated by shaking his fist at the Blue Jay dugout.

The celebration was premature. Devon White singled to start the Toronto ninth and Alomar homered to tie the game. LaRussa had to pull Eckersley, as Toronto loaded up the bases again with two outs. Jim Corsi finally got a big out for the A's, keeping the score 6-6.

Oakland was poised to win it in the ninth. Baines singled. Pinch-runner Eric Fox stole second and was bunted over to third with one out. But Ward got Steinbach and Lansford to kill the threat.

It was one more missed opportunity for the A's offense and it would be their last. Toronto picked up a run in the eleventh, Henke slammed the door and the Blue Jays had a commanding 3-1 series lead, with two home games still in tow.

The Blue Jays stood on the cusp of their first pennant, but it wasn't going to happen against Stewart in his own backyard. Sierra hit a two-run blast off Cone early in the game for a 2-0 lead. Jerry Browne filled in for Lansford at third base and delivered a four-hit game, including an RBI single in the third.. Oakland added three more in the fifth. Stewart went the distance, pitching a seven-hitter and winning 6-2.

Toronto's history of postseason failures meant no one in Canada was taking anything for granted. Especially because one of those failings—in 1985—involved blowing a 3-1 series lead and losing the final two games at home.

But not this year. In a late Wednesday afternoon start, the Blue Jay bats unloaded early and often against Moore. Carter hit a two-run blast in the first. Olerud added to the lead with an RBI single. And Maldonado blew it open in the third, with a three-run homer that made it 6-0. The rest of the afternoon and early evening was a party atmosphere in Skydome, with the Jays cruising to a 9-2 win.

Alomar was named 1992 ALCS MVP and it was a deserved honor. He finished the series with a stat line of .464 on-base percentage/.692 slugging percentage and his Game 4 home run off Eckersley remains the moment that defines this series, even more than 25 years later.

Credit also has to Olerud, Winfield and Maldonado, who were consistent bats throughout. And Devon White set the table effectively with a .448 OBP in the leadoff spot. Guzman's two wins, including the Game 6 clincher, led the starting pitching, while Henke saved the three close games and didn't allow a run.

Baines was the star on the Oakland side, with a stat line of .440/.640, including the game-winning home run in Game 1 that seemed like it might set the tone for the series. Sierra was excellent, at .357/.625. But Toronto was able to pitch around McGwire. The big slugger drew five walks, but didn't get a chance to make a big enough impact with his bat.

1992 WORLD SERIES

Toronto was finally in the World Series. The Atlanta Braves were back after losing a gut-wrenching seven-game Fall Classic the prior year. This one wouldn't go the distance, but the 1992 World Series broke a couple historical barriers and most of its six games went to the final inning.

Atlanta held home field advantage by virtue of the rotation system that was in place until 2003. The previous year's Fall Classic ended when the Braves had lost an epic Game 7 battle to Jack Morris, then pitching for Minnesota. Morris was now in Toronto and the '92 Series picked up where '91 left off—with Atlanta facing Morris.

Morris pitched shutout ball for the first five innings, making it 15 straight scoreless frames he'd tossed against the Braves in the World Series. But Atlanta's Tom Glavine was keeping his team in the game. Only a Joe Carter home run had the Blue Jays on the board and it was 1-0 going into the bottom of the sixth.

Atlanta finally broke through against Morris. With two on and two out, Damon Berryhill launched a three-run blast. It was all Glavine needed. He made the 3-1 score stand up with a complete-game four-hitter.

The Braves kept the momentum going in the early part of Game 2. They got a soft rally going against Cone, getting a run thanks to a walk, stolen base, error and wild pitch. Atlanta added another run in the fourth to go up 2-0.

John Smoltz got the first two batters out in the top of the fifth. Then Toronto got rolling. Borders worked a walk. Three singles later, one of them by Cone, plated two runs and tied the game. But the Braves immediately answered in their half of the inning. Deion Sanders singled to start a two-run rally that chased Cone and Atlanta took the 4-2 lead into the eighth inning.

Toronto got consecutive one-out hits from Alomar, Carter and Winfield. Smoltz was lifted and the bullpen—the weak part of the Atlanta team all year, had to try and hold the 4-3 lead. Mike Stanton came on with runners on the corners and got John Olerud to pop out, then K'd Kelly Gruber. The lead was intact going to the ninth.

Jeff Reardon was summoned to close it out and put Atlanta in firm control of the Series. The closer faced the 8-9 spots of the batting order. He walked the first batter, Derek Bell. Ed Sprague, a light-hitting reserve, came to the plate to bat in the pitcher's spot. And in a stunning turn of events, Sprague homered. It was the first pinch-hit home run for Toronto all year and it won Game 2 of the World Series, 5-4.

After a day off, the World Series went to Canada for the first time in history on Tuesday night. Juan Guzman, a 16-game winner, was on the mound for the Blue Jays. Atlanta countered with Steve Avery, a talented young lefty who had already had some serious postseason pedigree as the 1991 NLCS MVP.

The first three innings went by scoreless. Deion got Atlanta going in the fourth when he beat out an infield hit. Terry Pendleton followed with a base hit. David Justice then hit a rocket to center field that looked sure to score two runs.

Only it didn't. Devon White ran the ball down and made one of the most spectacular catches in World Series history. It would draw favorable comparisons to Willie Mays' legendary catch in the 1954 Fall Classic. And just like Mays had in '54, White was able to double off a runner in complete shock the ball had been caught. Pendleton was out, while Sanders was caught in a rundown. Deion barely escaped the tag and got back to second base to avoid the triple play. No matter, the inning ended without a run.

In the bottom of the inning, Carter immediately struck with another home run. In the blink of an eye, the Braves had gone from a potential big inning, to trailing 1-0.

Deion was swinging a good bat though and his sixth-inning double set up a game-tying base hit from Justice. In the top of the eighth, Atlanta took advantage of a Gruber error and scored the go-ahead run on a single by Lonnie Smith. But Gruber made amends—he homered off Avery in the bottom of the eighth and tied it back up 2-2.

Avery was still on in the bottom of the ninth. Alomar touched him for a single and promptly stole second. He was bunted over to third. A lot of managerial cat-and-mouse between Bobby Cox and Cito Gaston followed, with a couple pitching changes and pinch-hitters announced. It boiled down to a pair of intentional walks to load the bases.

Reardon came on again. Again Toronto got him, as Maldonado hit a ball into the right-centerfield gap that scored Alomar and won the game 3-2.

Glavine was back on the mound for Atlanta on short rest in Game 4, going up against Key. Both finesse pitchers were sharp and going into the seventh inning, a Borders solo home run accounted for all the scoring. In the bottom of the seventh, White capped off a three-hit game by driving in Gruber with two outs.

The insurance run proved significant. In the top of the eighth, a Ron Gant double keyed an Atlanta rally that had runners on first and third with none out. The Braves got the run in from third, but Ward got two big outs and preserved the 2-1 lead. Jays closer Tom Henke closed it out in the ninth. All of these World Series games might be close, but it was Toronto that had the commanding 3-1 series lead.

Morris would get the chance to win the game Toronto had brought him in for, facing off with Smoltz in Game 5. It was 2-2 in the fifth and when Morris retired the first two Braves' hitters, nothing dramatic seemed imminent.

But Atlanta leadoff man Otis Nixon singled and stole second to get himself in scoring position. Deion delivered with an RBI single that broke the tie. Pendleton hit a ground-rule double that put runners on second and third. After an intentional pass to Justice, Lonnie Smith broke the game open with a grand slam. Just like that it was 7-2 and that's how it ended. We were going back to Atlanta.

Saturday night's Game 6 pitted Cone against Avery and Toronto wasted no time getting their momentum back. White started the game with a single, stole second. He scored when Justice committed an error on a line drive to right field. The Blue Jays had a chance to get a big inning early, but Avery limited the damage and kept it at 1-0.

It was Deion who got the Braves going in the third, with a double and a steal of third. He scored on a sac fly to tie the game. But Toronto answered right back in the top of the fourth. Maldonado homered to start the inning. Again the Blue Jays threatened a big inning. Again, the Braves limited the damage. This time it was Deion doing it in the field, as he threw out Borders at the plate to end the inning and keep the score 2-1.

Both pitchers settled in and the tense game went to the ninth, still 2-1 with Henke trying to close out the championship for Toronto. Jeff Blauser kept hope alive for Atlanta with a leadoff single and he was bunted into scoring position.

Francisco Cabrera had been a ninth-inning hero in Game 7 of that year's NLCS and he had a chance to do it again here. Cabrera made good contact, but lined out to left. Nixon was the last chance for the Braves. And he came through with a game-tying single. It was 2-2. We were going to extra innings.

A pair of left handed starters took over pitching duties, as Key came on for Toronto and veteran Charlie Leibrandt pitched for Atlanta. The game went to the 11th inning still tied 2-2.

White was hit by a pitch and Alomar singled, giving the Blue Jays a shot. Winfield came to the plate with two outs. He pulled a grounder down the left field line that stayed fair. Both runners scored and it turned out that, once again, Toronto would need the insurance.

Blauser capped off his three-hit night with a single in the Atlanta 11th. An error by Lee put runners on first and third. The scenario was eerily similar to the seventh game of the NLCS when Atlanta trailed by two runs in the ninth and the tying run reached on an error.

Smoltz came on to pinch-run and he was bunted up to second base. There were runners on second and third with one out. Brian Hunter, a dangerous pinch-hitter, came up in the pitcher's spot. He grounded out to first. The run scored and cut the lead to 4-3, but now there were two outs.

Mike Timlin came out of the Toronto bullpen. Once again, Otis Nixon was Atlanta's last hope. The speedy Nixon dropped down a bunt and a pretty good one. If he beat it out, Smoltz could score the tying run. But Timlin was off the mound quickly, made the play and the celebration could begin in Toronto.

Borders was named World Series MVP, going 9-for-20. He only drove in three runs and, to be frank, didn't seem entirely impactful. But he was as good a choice as any for a Toronto team that had mostly won with balance.

The signature individual performance of the series came from Deion Sanders, who had gone 8-for-15, scored four runs, stole five bases and thrown a runner out at the plate in Game 6. It all depends on how you feel about voting for a player from the losing team. I'd have given Deion the MVP, but Borders was certainly a reasonable selection.

More important though, the monkey was off Toronto's back. They had finally won a World Series. And they weren't done.

1993

The 1993 Toronto Blue Jays were aiming to be the first team since 1978 to win back-to-back World Series. The Blue Jays said goodbye to Winfield, but they went on the free agent market and replaced him with another vet who was even better. Paul Molitor was at the end of a Hall of Fame career. Adding him not only put another bat in a stacked lineup, but it fatally weakened the Milwaukee Brewers, who had chased Toronto to the final weekend of the regular season in 1992.

Molitor posted a stat line of .402 on-base percentage/.509 slugging percentage. He batted .322, hit 22 homers and drove in 111 runs. It was good enough to put him second in the American League MVP voting.

Another future Hall of Famer, Alomar, produced a .408/.462 stat line and 55 stolen bases. Devon White provided speed, with 34 stolen bases. Carter added muscle with 33 home runs and 121 RBI. Tony Fernandez, the veteran shortstop, who was the defining link between this team and the first contending Blue Jays club in 1984, was back in the fold and finished with a stat line of .361/.442.

But none of these players—not the ones destined for Cooperstown nor anyone else—was the best player in Toronto's 1993 lineup. That honor belonged to Olerud. With his .473/.599 stat line, his 24 homers and 107 ribbies, with his .363 average that won the batting title, with his 158 games played...with all that, it is frankly staggering that Olerud did not receive a single MVP vote.

Olerud did finish third in the final voting, but he should have been ahead of Molitor and at least in the conversation with Chicago White Sox first baseman Frank Thomas, a unanimous winner. In either case, Olerud was the lynchpin of an offense that finished second in the American League in runs scored.

Toronto had strengthened their 1992 pitching staff with the addition of a championship-proven free agent in Jack Morris. They followed the same path in 1993 and signed Dave Stewart.

These moves, at least in the regular season, did not work out. Morris' 6.19 ERA indicated his career was effectively over. Stewart's ERA was 4.44 in 26 starts.

But here too, the Blue Jays had other options. The best of them was Guzman, who made 33 starts, won 14 games and finished with a 3.99 ERA. Pat Hentgen went 19-9 with a 3.87 ERA. Stottlemyre was more pedestrian with 11 wins and 4.84 ERA, but his 28 starts at least stabilized the rotation.

Those ERAs, even for Guzman and Hentgen, are high for a championship team, but offense in general was up around baseball. The average ERA for a staff hopped from 3.94 for 4.32. And Toronto had a good bullpen behind the rotation.

That pen was anchored by Ward, the closer who saved 45 games with a 2.13 ERA. Danny Cox, a starter on pennant-winning teams in St. Louis in the 1980s, shifted to relief work in Toronto and posted a 3.12 ERA. Mark Eichorn's ERA was 2.72. Tony Castillo clocked in 3.38. The only reliever whose ERA was on the high side was young Mike Timlin and his 4.69.

The work of the bullpen and the higher ERAs around the league are general are why Toronto pitching was still solid in 1993, coming in at fifth in the American League.

Toronto split six early games with eventual AL West champion Chicago. But they went on to lose six of nine, a stretch that included getting swept at home by Detroit. The Blue Jays bounced back by going to New York and Boston and grabbing four wins in six games, then sweeping lowly Minnesota. By Memorial Day, Toronto's record was 28-22. They were three games back of frontrunning Detroit, with New York and Boston also in the mix.

The Blue Jays continued to struggle head-to-head against the Tigers, losing three of four and falling as many as four games off the pace. But they heated up with a 12-4 stretch, steadily chewing up other AL East teams. The Jays moved into first place by as many as two games. But the last stretch of games before the All-Star break against AL West competition was brutal—a 1-9 record. They still held their lead in the division, but it was a slim half-game over Detroit.

It was a packed AL East race. A revived New York, managed by Buck Showalter, were only a game back. Baltimore was a 1 ½ off the pace and Boston was three back. There were a lot of contenders to overthrow the king.

One thing Detroit did not have was pitching and as is often the case, the late summer is cruel to teams with such shortcomings. The Blue Jays took three of four from the Tigers in late July. Toronto took two of three from Boston, who lacked rotation depth behind Roger Clemens. Both the Red Sox and Tigers faded from the race.

The Blue Jays were going all-in to win this repeat championship and it showed when they acquired another future Hall of Famer, left fielder Rickey Henderson at the July 31 trade deadline. Deadline moves, while common, didn't fly nearly as freely in 1993 as they do today.

The Henderson acquisition was a big deal. And over the final two months of the season, he took over the leadoff spot, put up a .356 OBP and stole 22 bases.

Toronto seemed to be gaining control, but a late August/early September trip to the west coast resulted in a 4-7 mark. By Labor Day, New York had pulled even. Baltimore was 2 ½ back. The race was on in the stretch drive.

There were two key series to focus on. The final two weekends of the regular season would feature a three-game set at home with New York and four games in Baltimore. The next 2 ½ weeks was about positioning for those head-to-head battles.

The Blue Jays went 10-4 over that stretch. The Yanks and Orioles both stumbled. When New York came to Toronto, the Blue Jays had a 5 ½ game lead. Only a complete collapse could do them in.

But anyone in Toronto who had lived through 1987, which had seen just such a collapse in the final week, was not going to take anything for granted.



Henderson showed why the Blue Jays added him in Friday night's opener, with two hits and scoring three runs. Devon White had a four-hit night. Guzman pitched well and Toronto won 7-3. Henderson came back on Saturday afternoon with two hits, two runs and the Jays rode young lefthander Al Leiter to a 3-1 win.

They clinched at least a tie and a one-game playoff. Sunday offered a chance to wrap it up in front of the home fans, but the Blue Jays lost 7-3. The champagne would travel with them to Milwaukee.

Molitor, returning to the place he had spent his entire major league career prior to '93, hit an early home run. Hentgen tossed 6 2/3 innings of shutout ball. The bullpen handled the rest. When Ward induced a double-play grounder in the ninth, the party could start. Toronto was the AL East champ for the fifth time in eight years.

Of course the AL East flag wasn't what the Blue Jays were about by this stage of their franchise development. Chicago was up next in the ALCS.

1993 ALCS

Even though Toronto had 95 wins, while Chicago won 94, it was the AL West's turn to host. So this series opened up on the South Side on a Tuesday night.

Each team had their ace ready, eventual Cy Young winner Jack McDowell for the White Sox and Guzman for the Blue Jays. Chicago had Guzman on the ropes twice in the early innings. But a

leadoff double from Ellis Burks was wasted in the second. Guzman then pitched around a pair of walks in the third and the game stayed scoreless.

Toronto broke through in the top of the fourth. With two on and two out, Ed Sprague came to the plate. A utility player whose improbable home run in Game 2 of the 1992 World Series turned momentum in the Blue Jays' favor, Sprague again came through. This time it was a triple down the right field line that picked up both runs.

Guzman did not have his good stuff and Chicago bounced right back. With the help of a walk and an error, the White Sox had runners on second and third with one out. Ozzie Guillen lined a single into right to tie up the game. After Guillen stole second, he scored on a base hit from Tim Lincecum. Chicago had a 3-2 lead.

The rally continued. MVP first baseman Frank Thomas worked a walk. A wild pitch and an intentional walk loaded the bases with two outs. Burks had a chance to break the game open and he hit a line drive...but at Olerud. The Blue Jays escaped trailing by just a run.

And they got to McDowell again in the top of the fifth. With two outs and a man aboard, Carter legged out an infield hit. Olerud ripped a double into the right-center gap to score both runs and put Toronto up 4-3. Molitor went the other way with a single to right and it was 5-3.

Chicago threatened again in the home half of the sixth with two singles and a walk. But in between, Raines was cut down attempting to steal. Burks had another opportunity with two outs, but flew out to end the inning.

With neither ace sharp, no one could get comfortable, so the Toronto bats went to work at taking out some insurance. With two outs in the seventh, Olerud and Molitor delivered again. The former singled and the latter homered. McDowell was gone. And this game was all but over. Ward came out of the Blue Jay bullpen and cleaned up the 7-3 win.

Guzman might have been the Toronto ace, but no one in baseball had a big-game reputation like Stewart. And he had the ball in his hand for Wednesday afternoon's Game 2.

Toronto quickly got him a run, going to work against Chicago's Alex Fernandez. An error by Thomas started the game. A base hit by Devon White set up Alomar to drive home the run with a productive ground ball out.

Stewart, uncharacteristically wild, gave it right back with three walks and a wild pitch. But the White Sox, with an opportunity to get a lot more, couldn't get a hit of their own and the inning ended in a 1-1 tie. They missed another chance in the second when Lance Johnson hit a leadoff double and was bunted up to third. Guillen and Raines were unable to drive in the lead run.

Toronto worked some two-out magic in the top of the fourth. After Molitor kept the inning alive with a double to right, Fernandez singled him home. A decision to go for the out at the plate let Fernandez move up to second. A throwing error by second baseman Joey Cora let another run

in. A game that had seen Chicago with most of the good early opportunities also had them trailing 3-1.

Alex Fernandez gamely kept his team in it, working out of a jam in the sixth and keeping the score 3-1. The White Sox got another big chance in the bottom of the inning.

Thomas and Ventura led off with singles. Burks drew a walk. The bases were loaded with no one out. Stewart dug in. He got Dan Pasqua on a fly ball to center too shallow to score a run. Lance Johnson popped out. Warren Newson bounced back to Stewart. No runs.

Stewart turned matters over the Blue Jay bullpen. Young Al Leiter, along with Ward, finished up the 3-1 win. Toronto had swept both games on the road. There was little reason for anyone to think baseball would return to the South Side before next spring. But these White Sox didn't roll over when they went on the road.

The Blue Jays came out in Friday night's Game 3 and immediately put pressure on young Chicago starter Wilson Alvarez, two on and one out in the bottom of the first. But Wilson induced Tony Fernandez to ground into a double play and kill the threat.

In the top of the third, Chicago went to work on Hentgen. Raines and Cora singled to right. Thomas, known for his muscle, beat out an infield hit to bring in the game's first run. A walk to Robin Ventura loaded the bases. Burks was coming to the plate.

After his numerous missed chances thus far, it had to be a relief for Burks to rip a two-run single. After a walk loaded the bases, Lance Johnson hit another two-run single. It was 5-0.

With Alvarez sharp, this was more than enough. Toronto picked up a run in the third and loaded up the bases with one out in the fourth. But when Alvarez again got Tony Fernandez, this time with a big strikeout, the starting pitcher had been pressured for the last time. He cruised to a complete-game victory, 6-1 and put his team back in the series.

The fourth starters took the mound on Saturday night, Stottlemyre for Toronto and Jason Bere for Chicago. It was a game where both teams would have to lean on their deep lineups and it was the White Sox who struck first. Burks singled to lead off the second, Lance Johnson homered and Chicago had a 2-zip lead.

Toronto countered in the home half of the third. Borders started the inning with a single. Devon White worked a one-out walk. Alomar doubled to left, Joe Carter singled and the Jays were up 3-2. A hit batsman and a walk loaded up the bases. Chicago manager Gene Lamont, trailing in the series, had no time to waste. He went to the bullpen.

Tim Belcher, normally a starter and a part of the Los Angeles Dodgers' team that stunned Oakland in the 1988 World Series, came on. Belcher struck out Tony Fernandez, got Sprague to ground to third and kept the White Sox in this game.

Pitching settled in until the top of the sixth when Thomas homered to tie it up 3-3. After two more walks, Lance Johnson came up with two down and delivered again. This time it was a triple that gave the White Sox a 5-3 lead.

There was no room to get comfortable though, not when Henderson walked and moved up on a wild pitch in the bottom of the same inning. Alomar's two-out double cut the lead to 5-4.

Leiter was on in relief for the seventh. After Guillen beat out an infield hit and Raines singled, there were runners on first and third. Cora was at the plate and he picked up the run with a productive out. It was valuable insurance. Chicago added one more run in the ninth. They got good bullpen work from Belcher, Kirk McCaskill and closer Roberto Hernandez. With the 7-4 win, the White Sox tied the series and ensured they would at least get back home.

Windy City sports fans had reason to be in good spirits for Game 5 on late Sunday afternoon. The Bears started the day off by beating the Eagles. Now McDowell would take the mound and try to give the White Sox control of this ALCS.

But for the second straight outing, the ace was no mystery to the Blue Jay lineup. Henderson greeted him with a double, stole third and then scored on McDowell's own throwing error. Molitor started a rally in the second with a double, took third on a base hit from Tony Fernandez and scored on Sprague's sac fly. Alomar led off the third with a walk, stole second, took third on Carter's grounder to the right side and came in on a base hit from Olerud. After a wild pitch and a walk, McDowell was unceremoniously gone.

Jose DeLeon temporarily kept the score at 3-0, but Toronto kept coming in the fourth. Devon White doubled to right, Alomar singled and now it was 4-0.

Guzman was back on the mound for Toronto and in control. Burks touched the ace for a home run in the fifth, but that was all Guzman allowed in seven innings of work. The Blue Jays added a run in the seventh and took a 5-1 lead into the ninth.

Ventura hit a two-run homer with two outs against Ward to cut the lead to 5-3. That wasn't alarming, but a walk to Burks allowed the legendary Bo Jackson to come to the plate as the tying run. The only window of hope Chicago fans had seen all day was quickly slammed shut when Bo struck out.

Even allowing the disappointing performance from McDowell, the White Sox couldn't be all that disappointed. They were still going home with a chance and that's not something too many people would have dared predict back on Friday night. But Dave Stewart was waiting.

Alex Fernandez again had the task of facing off with Stewart on Tuesday evening. The young pitcher hurt himself early on, issuing a walk and hitting a batter to give Toronto a second-inning opportunity. The Blue Jays cashed it in, with a sac bunt from Tony Fernandez and a base hit from Borders that scored both runs.

Guillen touched Stewart in the third with a one-out double. After Raines singled to left and Stewart hit a batter of his own, the bases were loaded. Thomas was at the plate. Stewart walked the soon-to-be American League MVP and future Hall of Famer. Ventura's RBI ground ball tied up the game.

But what Ventura had earned with his bat, he immediately gave back with his glove—an error that opened the top of the fourth. Sprague singled. There were runners on the corners. Alex Fernandez got what looked like an inning-ending double play ground ball off the bat of Borders. But on the relay, Cora threw the ball away and the go-ahead run came in.

Toronto threatened to break it open in the fifth when two singles and a double steal brought Olerud to the plate with one out. He popped it up and Chicago was still within a run.

Stewart was settled in and the 3-2 lead held to the bottom of the seventh. After a leadoff walk, Guillen bunted the tying run into scoring position. Raines came to the plate. He hit the ball on the screws to second base. But it ended up as a line drive double play. Sometimes, it's just not your night.

Alex Fernandez had again kept his team in the game though, and it was still 3-2 in the ninth. But Toronto opened it up against the bullpen. Devon White homered for a huge insurance run. Then with two outs, Carter singled, Olerud reached on an error, and Molitor lashed a triple. It was 6-2, and all but over.

The White Sox picked up a run in the ninth, but Ward closed it out. When Raines hit a fly ball to right and Carter gloved it, Toronto had won their second straight American League pennant.

Stewart was named ALCS MVP, the second time in his career he had won the But there were other good candidates. Guzman also won twice. The fact Toronto's aces pitched well, getting all four Blue Jays wins, while McDowell struggled, was the defining difference in this series.

Stewart and Guzman's composite pitching lines were almost identical. Each gave up three earned runs. Stewart went 13.1 innings, while Guzman went an even 13. I guess that extra out, along with the fact Stewart pitched the clincher, is enough to make him the right MVP choice in a close call.

Offensively, Devon White had collected twelve hits, including the home run that all but sealed the pennant. Molitor, Alomar, Olerud and Tony Fernandez were all consistent at the plate throughout the six games.

On the White Sox' side, Raines had twelve hits of his own. If his line drive in the latter stages of Game 6 meets a better fate, perhaps he ends up MVP of this series. Burks went 7-for-23, but had the numerous missed chances in big situations we've chronicled here. Thomas was 6-for-17, but Toronto made a conscious decision not to let "The Big Hurt" beat them and Thomas walked ten times. Alex Fernandez had the hardest luck—15 innings pitched, a 1.80 series ERA...and two losses to show for it.

All of baseball had been anticipating a Toronto-Atlanta rematch in the World Series. But the Braves couldn't survive their own NLCS battle against Philadelphia. It was the upstart Phillies, contenders for the first time in ten years, that were the last barrier in the Blue Jays' quest for history.

1993 WORLD SERIES

The '93 World Series opened up on a Saturday night at Skydome, the name Toronto's Rogers Centre used to go by. Both teams had their aces lined up to pitch Game 1. Guzman, fresh off two wins in the ALCS, was going for Toronto. A 26-year-old Curt Schilling making his first appearance in the postseason, was looking to build on his NLCS MVP performance for Philadelphia.

A potent Phillie offense wasted no time. Lenny Dykstra led off with a walk, stole second and scored on an opposite field base hit from John Kruk. After another walk by Guzman, Darren Daulton delivered an RBI single. It was 2-0 and there were still runners on the corners and none out. Guzman buckled down to strike out Jim Eisenreich and Ricky Jordan and end the inning.

Toronto made their first move on Schilling on the bottom of the second. Carter and Olerud started the frame with singles. After a wild pitch moved them both up, Molitor singled in both runs to tie the game.

More back and forth followed in the third. This time it was Mariano Duncan getting aboard for the Phils, stealing second and coming home on an RBI base hit from Kruk. But in the bottom of the inning an error by Philadelphia left fielder Milt Thompson set up Carter to tie it back up with a sac fly.

The fifth inning was more of the same. Duncan tripled and scored on a wild pitch to give the Phillies the lead. Devon White answered in the bottom of the inning with a two-out home run. We had a 4-4 tie.

By rights, Philadelphia should have scored in the sixth when they got three singles and a walk. But in between all that, Thompson's rough night continued when he grounded into a double play. Leiter, on in relief of Guzman, escaped unscathed. And when Olerud homered off Schilling in the inning's bottom half, the Blue Jays had a 5-4 lead.

The Phils turned to their own bullpen, but David West could not keep the score tight. Pat Borders and Rickey Henderson hit one-out singles in the seventh. Devon White and Alomar doubled. It was 8-4 and the game was broken open. Philadelphia picked up a run in the ninth, but the 8-5 final did not get tight again.

Toronto now held the command position. Stewart was facing off against Philadelphia's Terry Mulholland for Game 2.

After a couple scoreless innings, the Phillies again drew first blood and again it started with a Dykstra walk. This one was followed by a Duncan walk. Kruk blooped a single to bring in one

run. Dave Hollins singled and it was 2-0. Daulton grounded out. The runners moved up to second and third. That didn't matter, because Eisenreich unloaded with a three-run blast. The Phils had made Stewart bleed and had a 5-0 lead.



Toronto's lineup was deep and there was still a lot of game left. Molitor started the bottom of the fourth with a single and Carter hit a home run of his own. In the bottom of the sixth, Alomar knocked out a two-out single and scored when Tony Fernandez doubled into the left field gap. Mulholland was chased and at 5-3 we had a ballgame going into the final three innings.

The Blue Jays were into their bullpen and Dykstra homered in the seventh to push the lead to 6-3. The Phils loaded the bases with one out in the eighth and had a chance to break it open for good. But Timlin came out of the Toronto pen, struck out Duncan and held the score right there.

Timlin's clutch work looked even bigger when Molitor doubled to lead off the eighth, stole third and scored on a sac fly. Alomar worked a walk and stole second. The Phils had turned to closer Mitch Williams, but the relief pitcher known as "The Wild Thing" had a way of putting his team and their fans on a roller-coaster.

But tonight he picked off Alomar and finished the eighth. Even though Fernandez walked in the ninth, Williams finished the game by getting a double play ground ball. With the 6-4 win, the Phillies had a road split and were heading back home for the next three games.

On Tuesday night, Philadelphia was on fire for the first World Series game at the old Vet since 1983. Danny Jackson, who pitched a gem in a must-win NLCS spot, was on the mound. Pat Hentgen—steady, consistent and a future Cy Young Award winner, was going for Toronto.

Jackson didn't have the same stuff he'd enjoyed in his NLCS start. Henderson singled to start the game. White walked. Molitor tripled both runners in, then scored on a sac fly from Carter. Just like that, it was 3-0 Jays.

The Phils were primed to immediately get back in it when Duncan and Kruk singled, then moved up on a throwing error by Carter. With runners on second and third and one out, Hollins and Daulton both struck out.

It set the tone for the night. Molitor homered in the third to make it 4-0. A leadoff double from Kruk in the bottom of the fourth was wasted. Alomar led off the top of the sixth, stole both second and third and scored on a sac fly from Fernandez.

Eisenreich came up with a two-out RBI single to make it 5-1 after six, but the Blue Jay bats just piled on for more. Henderson doubled and White tripled in the seventh, keying a three-run rally. The final ended up 10-3, with Alomar adding an RBI triple to his four-hit night.

Wednesday night's Game 4 would become one of the most famous in World Series history, at least among games that didn't end the Series. To say the bats were rolling...well, it would have been an understatement.

Tommy Greene was the Phils' #2 starter and pitched extremely well in the clinching game of the NLCS. But the Blue Jays were on him from the outset. Henderson led the game off with a double. White worked a walk. Carter beat out an infield hit. The bases were loaded with one out. Greene got Olerud to pop out and was in position to escape. But Molitor walked, forcing in a run, Fernandez hit a two-run single and for the second straight night, the Phillie bats were down 3-0 before getting to the plate.

But Toronto starter Todd Stottlemyre was wild. He walked four men in the first inning. With a run in, the bases loaded and two outs, the Phils got a hit of their own—a triple from Thompson that cleared the bases and put Philadelphia up 4-3. And the night was still very young.

The lead was extended to 6-3 in the second when Greene helped himself with a single and Dykstra homered down the right field line. But Greene was better with the bat tonight than he was with his arm. A walk, followed by consecutive singles from Molitor, Fernandez and Borders cut the lead to 6-5.

With runners still on first and second, Philadelphia manager Jim Fregosi went to his bullpen for Roger Mason. It didn't help. After a two-out walk to Henderson, White's line drive single to center plated two more runs. The Blue Jays had the lead and a double steal moved two more runs into scoring position. Finally, Mason struck out Alomar to end the inning.

Leiter came out of the Toronto bullpen. With two outs, Dykstra doubled, Duncan picked him up with an RBI single and we were tied at a touchdown apiece just four innings in.

The Phillie offense had another burst in the fifth, using the strategy of letting small ball lead to big ball. Hollins bunted for a hit to start the inning. Daulton went to the opposite field for a home run and a 9-7 lead. Eisenreich bunted for a hit. Thompson promptly ripped an RBI double. With two outs, Dykstra homered. It was 12-7.

Was this enough? West came out of the Phillie bullpen. To no avail. White greeted him with a double and scored on a base hit from Alomar. Olerud singled to put runners on the corners with one out. A productive ground ball from Fernandez made it 12-9.

The Phillie bats just kept coming. Hollins led off the sixth with a double and scored on a single by Thompson. In the seventh, Duncan's infield hit was followed by two walks and a hit batsman. With the bases loaded and one out, Eisenreich popped out. The score stayed at 14-9. But with six outs to go, surely this had to be enough.

Larry Andersen was on in relief, having set down the side in the seventh and looking like someone who could finally stabilize this game. He got Alomar to start the eighth.

Then, as though we hadn't seen enough, all hell *really* broke loose. Carter singled. Olerud walked. Molitor doubled to left. The score was 14-10 and there were runners on second and third. Williams came out of the bullpen.

Fernandez singled. 14-11, runners on first and third and still only one out. Borders came to the plate as the tying run. The Wild Thing walked him. He struck out Ed Sprague and got to the brink of closing out the inning. But the top of the order was up.

Henderson's single scored twice and made it 14-13. White tripled. Two more runs came in. A stunned crowd now saw the home team trailing 15-14. The Blue Jays also found some relief help. Timlin and closer Duane Ward set down the next six batters in order. One of the wildest nights the World Series had ever seen was over.

So, it seemed, was this particular World Series. Toronto had a 3-1 series lead and two home games still in the bank.

The aces rematched on Thursday night. After all the offense of Game 4, some good old-fashioned pitching helped everyone catch their breath. The Phils were able to grab a quick run in the first when Dykstra walked, stole second, took third on a bad throw and came home on Kruk's productive groundball. They added another run in the second with doubles from Daulton and Kevin Stocker.

Guzman got settled in. But Schilling was locked in. The Philadelphia ace delivered a complete-game five-hitter. The Phils won 3-1 and extended the series.

The win seemed more like a stay of execution for the Phillies than a real avenue toward coming back. That sense was heightened in the first inning of Game 6. Toronto came out swinging against Mulholland. After White walked, Molitor tripled and then scored on a sac fly from Carter. With two outs, Olerud doubled, Alomar came up with a two-out RBI single and Stewart had a quick 3-0 lead.

The Phillies picked up a run in the fourth when Daulton's two-out double was followed by Eisenreich's RBI single. But the Blue Jays immediately answered when Alomar doubled and came around on consecutive productive outs. A Molitor home run in the fifth made it 5-1. That score held to the seventh. The night was shaping up to be one long party in Toronto.

Not so fast. In the blink of an eye in the top of the seventh, Stocker walked, Mickey Morandini singled and Dykstra homered. It was 5-4 and Stewart was gone. Danny Cox came on, but Philadelphia kept hitting. Duncan singled and then stole second with one out. Hollins' RBI single tied the game. Put the champagne on hold.

Another walk and an infield hit loaded the bases. Leiter came on. A sac fly from Pete Incaviglia gave the Phils a 6-5 lead. When the bullpen combination of Mason, West and Andersen held that score to the ninth, the ultimate outcome of this Series was finally back in doubt.

It's worth noting though that Philadelphia missed a big chance in the top of the eighth when they were gifted two walks and a hit batsman, but failed to add on. The way this particular World Series was shaping up, you could never have too many runs.

And with The Wild Thing now on the mound you could never get comfortable. Williams walked Henderson to start the ninth. After Devon White flied out, Molitor hit a hard line drive to center for a base hit. There were runners on first and second. Skydome was alive. Carter came to the plate.

The count ran to two balls and two strikes. Williams threw a pitch that he appeared to be trying to hit the inside corner with. It was left out too far over the plate. Carter deposited it in the left field stands. For just the second time in history, a World Series had ended on a walk off home run.

It was a fitting end to a Series where offense had been so prominent and the back-and-forth between the lineups so frequent. Molitor was named World Series MVP, with a brilliant 12-for-24 showing at the plate, including two home runs, eight RBIs and ten runs scored. Alomar was almost as good, going 12-for-25. Carter drove in eight runs, including the three that ended the Series.

The Phillie lineup had players who met the moment in October. Dykstra had homered four times and had a .500 on-base percentage. Kruk went 8-for-23 and consistently drove in big runs. On the pitching side, Mason quietly did very good work out of the bullpen, going 7.2 innings and allowing just one run. Schilling's Game 5 gem remains a well-remembered part of the postseason portfolio he would develop over his career.

But ultimately, the story was the Toronto Blue Jays. This was a franchise that was now on eleven consecutive winning seasons. For much of that period, the "can't win the big one tag" followed them around. They shed that label in 1992. And in 1993, it was replaced with a new tag—one that read "Dynasty."