

## **OAKLAND'S BASH BROTHERS**

*The A's From 1988-92*



The Oakland A's are a franchise known for their notable runs, when this otherwise small-market team makes the most of its resources and steps onto the national stage for several years. The most prominent run was 1971-75, when they won five straight AL West titles and three consecutive World Series crowns. There was also the 2000-06 run, an era where GM Billy Beane's shrewd use of a small payroll was immortalized by the Brad Pitt movie *Moneyball*.

In between those two eras—one when the A's were the best team in baseball and another where they were the plucky underdog, was the five-year stretch from 1988-92. The era of the Bash Brothers.

The A's teams of this era were managed by Tony LaRussa. The future Hall of Fame skipper came on board midway through 1986, when the franchise was enroute to their fifth straight losing season. In LaRussa's first full year of 1987, the A's got to .500. And in 1988 they took off.

Oakland drew their nickname from the presence of Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire. Built like they could play on the offensive line in the NFL (aided by what we now know to be performance-enhancing drugs), Canseco and McGwire drew the Bash Brothers nickname and were the focal point of a great era in Oakland A's history.

Canseco and McGwire may have been the media focus, but they were far from the only stars. Dave Stewart was one of the top starting pitchers in baseball. Dennis Eckersley put together a Hall of Fame resume as the closer. Bob Welch won a Cy Young Award. Carney Lansford was a solid third baseman. Role players moved in and out of the lineup, the bullpen and the rotation, with LaRussa always seeming to squeeze the most out of them.

Over the 1988-92 era, the A's won four AL West titles. They captured three consecutive American League pennants, dominating ALCS play in those years to the tune of a 12-1 record. They won a World Series title. And they did it with a color and personality that captured the attention of a nation.

In spite of this, the A's of this era remain an underappreciated team in the annals of baseball history. Some of this is their own fault—the indisputable PED usage of Canseco and McGwire soured many fans on both in later years. On the field, Oakland's World Series losses in 1988 and 1990 both rank among the biggest upsets in the history of the Fall Classic.

But there's far more on the positive side of the ledger. Players like Stewart, Eckersley, Lansford, Welch and others were never suspected of PEDs. The 1989 team that won the World Series was a truly great champion, both on and off the field, doing it in the middle of an earthquake that wracked their home region.

This compilation will tell it all, the great pennant runs in what was a very competitive AL West. The dominance of the American League Championship Series round and the ultimate vindication of 1989. And we'll see the downside unfold, those World Series losses that deprived this team the ultimate label of "dynasty."

Each of the five seasons has its own article published individually on TheSportsNotebook.com. So do all seven postseason series the A's played in during this era. The 12 articles are compiled and edited here to create a cohesive compilation.

From the bats to the arms, from the muscle to the finesse, the Oakland A's of the Bash Brothers era could do it all. This is their story.

## **1988**

LaRussa's team did everything well. They were second in the American League in runs scored, even playing in the pitcher-friendly park that is Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum. The A's

ranked in the top five in every notable offensive category, from on-base percentage to slugging percentage to batting average to walks to stolen bases. And they could pitch—the staff took full advantage of their home park and produced the best ERA in the American League.



No one did it better than Canseco. The rising star became the first player in MLB history to hit 40 home runs and steal 40 bases in the same year. He would later be joined by other disgraced PED users, Alex Rodriguez and Barry Bonds in this exclusive club. Canseco also finished with a .391 OBP/.569 slugging percentage and won the MVP award.

McGwire hit 32 home runs and finished with 99 RBI. Canseco and McGwire were “The Bash Brothers”, and they had a good supporting cast. Dave Henderson played centerfield and finished with a .363 OBP/.525 slugging. Third baseman Carney Lansford swiped 29 bases, and left fielder Luis Polonia stole 24 more. Glenn Hubbard and Walt Weiss were consistent defensively up the middle.

Dave Parker and Don Baylor were well past their prime, ages 37 and 39 respectively, but the two former MVP winners still provided valuable leadership. Although the price of acquiring Parker from the Cincinnati Reds—a young pitcher by the name of Jose Rijo—would come back to bite Oakland in 1990.

Another trade worked out extremely well for the A’s. As part of a three-team deal with the New York Mets and Los Angeles Dodgers, they got Bob Welch to help in the starting rotation, and Welch won 17 games with a 3.64 ERA.

The price was shortstop Alfredo Griffin and closer Jay Howell. Griffin hit below .200 in 1988 for the Dodgers. Howell was good, but the bullpen wasn’t exactly Oakland’s problem—Eckersley saved 45 games with a 2.35 ERA and was the best closer in baseball.

And there was a lot of help, both in the rotation and the setup team, to get the ball to Eckersley. Stewart won 21 games with a 3.23 ERA and was the #1 starter. After Welch, there was also Storm Davis, a 16-game winner with a 3.70 ERA. Curt Young chipped in 11 wins and 24-year-old Todd Burns made fourteen starts and posted a solid 3.16 ERA.

The bullpen depth was outstanding, as LaRussa had two different righty-lefty combos that could bridge from the rotation to Eckersley. Eric Plunk and Greg Cadaret was one “team”, with Gene Nelson and Rick Honeycutt the other. The ERAs ranged from 2.89 to 3.50, as LaRussa brilliantly got the most out of everyone.

After splitting their first twelve games, Oakland took off. They won 18 of 19 between April 18 and May 9 and spurted out to a nine-game lead on the Minnesota Twins, who had won the 1987 World Series. The summer saw the A’s move along a little more sluggishly.

After they took two of three from the Twins and saw their lead climb to ten games, Oakland lost eight of ten. They dropped three of four to Minnesota at home and closed the first half of the season by losing five of seven to the Cleveland Indians and Detroit Tigers. The A's still had the best record in baseball at 54-34, but the Twins were within 5 ½ games.

The second half didn't start out a lot better, with three losses in four games to the Toronto Blue Jays. With the margin down to three games, Oakland turned it around against the same teams they had sent them into the break on a down note—the A's won six of seven games against the Indians and Tigers in the return series and regained their footing.

Oakland's lead was back to 6 ½ games, and from August 3<sup>rd</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>, the A's reeled off a 25-9 stretch that put it away. They were 10 ½ games up. That decisive stretch had no head-to-head games with the Twins, although for good measure, Oakland beat their nearest rival five times in six tries over the last two weeks to seal the deal.

All that was left in September was the drama of Canseco's push for the 40/40 club. On September 18, he hit home run #40. Five days later, he stole two bases in Milwaukee to make history. By an odd coincidence, the last historic stolen base by a player in an Oakland uniform had also been in Milwaukee—Rickey Henderson broke the single-season stolen base record in an A's uniform in 1982, with the record steal coming on the road against the Brewers.

Oakland cruised on in to win the division. Boston was waiting in the ALCS.

## 1988 ALCS

The A's and Red Sox had considerably different resumes when they came into the 1988 ALCS. The A's had dethroned the defending World Series champ in the AL West, won 104 games and were the favorite to win it all. The Red Sox had fired a manager in midseason and crawled to the top of a weak AL East, winning the division with an 89-73 record.

The results of the American League Championship Series were predictable—an Oakland sweep—but the Red Sox made each game competitive and the ALCS was filled with could've, should've moments that might have altered its course.

Homefield advantage was determined on a divisional rotation basis, and it was the East's turn, so in spite of the records, the series opened in Fenway Park on the first Wednesday afternoon of October. Stewart got the start for the A's, while the Red Sox went to lefty Bruce Hurst, who was about to be voted MVP of the 1986 World Series before a certain infamous two-out rally and ground ball got in the way.

Stewart and Hurst each pitched well, and no one scored until the fourth, when Canseco hit a solo home run. In the bottom of the seventh, the Red Sox tied it. Jim Rice drew a one-out walk, Stewart hit Jody Reed with a pitch and Rich Gedman singled to load the bases.

Lefthander Rick Honeycutt was summoned to face Wade Boggs. The third baseman hit it hard, a line drive to left, but it was caught. The tying run was still able to score.

Even though Boston had tied it, the opportunity for a big inning with Boggs at the plate had been missed. Oakland immediately made it hurt. Lansford led off the top of the eighth with a double down the left field line and Dave Henderson promptly slapped a single the other way to right. Eckersley came on, and with two outs in the ninth, Reed doubled and Gedman walked. Boggs had another chance, but struck out, ending the 2-1 game.

The Red Sox hoped Roger Clemens could win what was close to a must-win game at Fenway Park on Thursday night in Game 2. The A's went with Davis, and once again, both starting pitchers were sharp. No one scored through five innings.

It was Boston who broke through with two outs in the sixth. Dwight Evans and Mike Greenwell each walked, and then Rice's line drive to centerfield was muffed by Dave Henderson. It called to mind key outfield errors made by the A's when these same franchises met in the 1975 ALCS. The Red Sox had the game's first run and a base hit by Ellis Burks made it 2-0.

Once again, Oakland not only responded, they did it within two batters. Henderson singled to start the seventh and Canseco homered to tie the game. Dave Parker singled. After a ground ball force out put the faster Lansford on the bases, he took second on a balk, third on a two-out wild pitch and scored on a single to left by Mark McGwire.



The Red Sox had their own response, getting a Gedman home run to wrap around the Pesky Pole in right field and tying the game 3-3. The game would go into the hands of the closers, Eckersley and Boston's Lee Smith.

With two outs in the ninth, Smith was ready to give his lineup a chance, but three rapid singles by Ron Hassey, Tony Phillips and Walt Weiss scored the go-ahead run. The lightest hitters of the Oakland lineup had beaten one of the game's better closers. Eckersley—the game's very *best* closer, slammed the door on the 4-3 win.

The ALCS shifted west for an early evening local start in Game 3 and Boston didn't show any signs of quitting against Welch. The top of the first began with consecutive singles by the Red Sox' Killer B's—Burks, Marty Barrett and Boggs. Greenwell cleared the bases with a double and a 3-0 lead. One inning later, Burks doubled, was bunted over and scored on a Boggs sac fly. Greenwell, who finished second to Canseco in the MVP voting, came through again, with a solo home run.

With a 5-0 lead and Mike Boddicker, the MVP of the 1983 ALCS for the Baltimore Orioles, on the mound, it would have seemed Boston was ready to get back in the series. But Oakland wiped out almost the entire lead by the time the second inning was over.

McGwire led off the bottom of the second with a home run. Hassey singled, and then scored on a two-out double from Weiss. Lansford homered and it was 5-4. In the bottom of the third,

Boddicker again got two outs but couldn't finish. McGwire singled and Hassey homered, and the A's had the lead by the time the game went to the middle innings.

Welch had been removed and reliever Gene Nelson got out of two key jams. In the third inning and fifth innings, the Red Sox had runners on the corners with one out. Both times, Nelson got a double play grounder. In the fifth, the combination of McGwire and Hassey again delivered, and with two outs. A single and double from the duo made the game 7-5.

An Oakland mistake helped Boston pick up a run in the seventh, when Boggs was able to take second on a two-out single due to another Dave Henderson error in the outfield. Evans picked up the RBI with a base hit. But the notion of a shutdown inning was something the Red Sox staff just couldn't pull off. Parker doubled with one out in the bottom of the seventh and Stan Javier drilled a two-out single to widen the lead back to 8-6.

The ball went to Eckersley who set down six straight Boston batters and a two-run homer by Dave Henderson stripped whatever drama was left in the 10-6 final.

A comeback by the Red Sox looked hopeless, and there wasn't even a 2004 rallying cry to invoke at this time. Not to mention, Stewart was on the mound for Game 4, ready to make three starts in this ALCS if necessary. Hurst would try and extend the series for Boston.

Hurst pitched reasonably well, but he fell behind early. Canseco got him for an opposite field home run in the first, and Dave Henderson hit an RBI double in the second. Hurst settled in and kept the game at 2-0 and the Red Sox tried to rally in the sixth.

Barrett worked a leadoff walk and Boggs followed with a single. Boston picked up a run with productive ground ball outs from Greenwell and Rice, but once again, the chance for a crooked number at a time when it was badly needed was missed. Stewart was removed in the eighth after surrendering a leadoff single to Burks, but Honeycutt promptly got a double-play ball from Barrett.

Eckersley, the Mariano Rivera of his day, was ready for the ninth, so a 2-1 lead seemed insurmountable. But in case there was any doubt, the A's tacked on two more runs in the bottom of the eighth. Eck slammed the door for his fourth straight save to clinch Oakland's first pennant since 1974.

The 1988 ALCS MVP went to Eckersley, for his four saves, encompassing six innings and zero runs. It was the right pick, as his ability to close out games while Smith struggled and gave up three runs in 3.1 IP, was the single biggest difference in this series.

But it was far from the only difference. Nelson worked 4.2 IP of shutout ball, including the key moments of Game 3 when Boston was in its strongest position. Canseco hit three home runs, all of them significant. The only Red Sox performer of note was Boggs, who hit .385.

The biggest surprise was not that Oakland won this ALCS, or even that they swept it. It's that they only had one more win ahead of them.

## 1988 WORLD SERIES

The 1988 World Series was supposed to be a coronation for the 104-win Oakland Athletics. It ended up being a stunning upset for the Los Angeles Dodgers, as an iconic baseball moment started the series and the dominance of LA ace Orel Hershiser took over from there.

The Dodgers entered the series with one big disadvantage—aside from already being seen as the decisively inferior team—their MVP right fielder Kirk Gibson was hurt and available for pinch-hit duty at most. They still had home field advantage though, thanks to the rotation system that existed prior to 2003, so for the second straight series, LA opened at home against a team that won 100 or more games.

Hershiser had pitched Game 7 of the NLCS win over the New York Mets, so rookie Tim Lincecum would pitch the opener against Stewart. The Dodgers staked the kid to an early lead, when Steve Sax was hit by a pitch and Mickey Hatcher homered in the first inning.

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

Lansford also worked a walk and it brought up Canseco with two outs. Canseco unloaded a grand slam and it was 4-2.

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

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

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

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

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

The Dodgers saw an old friend on the mound for Game 3 in Oakland. They had traded Welch to the A's in the offseason and he would be the starter for Tuesday night's must-win game. John Tudor was on the mound for Los Angeles, but he had to be removed in the second inning. Tim Leary came on.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

As for Oakland, it was a stunning and unexpected ending to a magnificent season. But they would be back.

## 1989

The 1989 Oakland Athletics are a great championship team that has managed to slide under the radar of baseball history. They pulled away in the AL West race, so that most regular season attention focused on the more exciting race in the AL East. The A's rolled through the playoffs, but the big story of the 1989 World Series was the earthquake that devastated a Bay Area battle with the San Francisco Giants, caused a delay for ten days between games and more importantly, caused massive human suffering.

It's for those reasons—along with the fact that this same basic cast of characters lost the World Series as heavy favorites in both 1988 to the Los Angeles Dodgers and 1990 to the Cincinnati Reds, that the 1989 Oakland A's can slide under the historical radar. But they shouldn't.



Oakland is renowned for having The Bash Brothers of Canseco and McGwire, and McGwire hit 33 home runs in 1989. Canseco, though, suffered a wrist injury prior to the season and didn't return until after the All-Star break, playing in only 65 games. The A's needed other contributors to step up.

It was the pitching that really stepped up and Oakland's staff was the best in the league. Stewart won 21 games with a 3.32 ERA and rolled up 257 innings as the rotation ace. Welch was a 17-game winner with 3.00 ERA. Mike Moore, signed on the free agent market, won 19 and his ERA was 2.61. Both Welch

and Moore worked over 200 innings.

Eckersley was the game's best closer, with 33 saves and a buck-56 ERA. The bridge from the rotation to Eck was strong, with Todd Burns, Gene Nelson and Rick Honeycutt having good years. And no one knew how to handle a bullpen like LaRussa.

With that kind of pitching, it didn't take a lot of offense, but even without Canseco, the A's still scored the fourth-most runs in the American League. They made up for the power outage by running. Lansford stole 37 bases, and on June 21, Oakland swung a trade with the New York Yankees to get Rickey Henderson. The left fielder anchored the leadoff spot, stole 52 bases the rest of the way and finished with a .425 on-base percentage.

Parker filled some of the power void and the DH hit 22 home runs and finished with 97 RBI. And when Canseco did come back, he hit 17 home runs in less than a half-season of play.

Oakland played well right from the outset and a schedule mostly against the weaker AL East had them at 33-16 on Memorial Day. One notable exception to the schedule was six games against the California Angels. The A's won four of the six and narrowly led the Angels in the AL West. The Royals and Rangers were also in the mix.

Any of the West's top four would have been leading the East. But after a decade where the balance of power in the American League had tilted eastward, the pendulum was moving back the other way.

And that, combined with no wild-card entry to the playoffs, meant that Oakland had little margin for error. They struggled in June and played sub-.500 baseball. That included losing six of ten in home games against KC, California and Texas. By the All-Star break, the A's record was still a solid 52-36. But they were now a game and a half back of the Angels. The Royals were 3 ½ back and the Rangers still giving chase at 5 ½ off the pace.

Canseco came back, but he couldn't stop Oakland from losing another home series to California at the end of July. August is where the A's finally started to reclaim their mojo. By August 11, they pulled back into a tie for first place. Just in time to go to Anaheim and play a weekend series showdown.

Moore started Friday night's opener and was brilliant, working a complete-game shutout. Lansford and Phillips each homered, Steinbach had three hits and Oakland cruised to a 5-0 win.

Lansford and Steinbach had two hits apiece again on Saturday afternoon and helped nudge the A's to a 4-3 lead. Burns was doing some yeoman's work out of the bullpen and tossed four shutout innings. McGwire finally broke the game open with an eighth-inning blast and Oakland won it 8-3.

The A's were definitely leaving town in first place and with Stewart on the mound on Sunday, they had a chance to really jam a knife into the Angels. Stewart lost a tough 4-3 decision to future Hall of Famer Bert Blyleven who pitched for California. But either way, it was a successful weekend and no one in baseball doubted what way the momentum was flowing in the AL West race.

The Angels started to fade and the Royals picked up the pace. Kansas City took a series from Oakland at the end of August. By Labor Day, the A's were 83-54 and in the division lead. The Royals were now just 2 ½ out and the Angels fighting to hang on at 4 ½ back. The Rangers had faded in the cruel months of late summer.

Oakland came out of the Labor Day weekend with a home series against Boston. The Red Sox were going through a rough year after winning the AL East in 1988. But they beat the A's 8-5 and had Clemens going in the second game. The Oakland offense responded to the challenge.

An early Steinbach home run helped give the A's a 5-1 lead. And they unloaded late off the Boston bullpen, winning 13-1. Oakland took the series on Wednesday afternoon when Parker's grand slam keyed a 7-5 win. Over the weekend, the A's grabbed two of three from what was a bad New York Yankees team. And their lead in the West stretched to a comfortable 4 ½ games.

But the return trip to Fenway Park did not go well. Oakland lost three straight. With two weeks to go, both California and Kansas City were back to within 2 ½ games.

Oakland responded by sweeping lowly Cleveland. While the Angels kept pace, the Royals did not and slipped back to 4 ½ out. And Kansas City was the more pertinent opponent, because the Royals and A's would play head-to-head in Oakland on the final weekend of the season.

The A's went to Minnesota for the penultimate weekend. The Twins were mediocre this year. Welch pitched brilliantly in Thursday night's opener, Lansford had three more hits, McGwire homered and the A's won 2-1.

Stewart got the ball on Friday night and kept on rolling, winning 5-2 behind two-RBI games from Parker and Canseco. Even though Oakland lost on Saturday, they bounced back on Sunday. Lansford, one of the underrated stars on this team, had a three-hit day. McGwire drove in four runs. A 9-3 win capped the series.

Taking three out of four from the Twins was decisive, because the Angels and Royals could not keep up. Going into the final week, the margin was up to 5 ½ games. It was all but over and on Wednesday night at home it became official. Canseco homered, the offense staked Moore to a quick 3-0 lead over Texas. Moore rolled to a 5-0 win and for the second straight season, the Oakland A's were champions of the AL West.

Overcoming the loss of Canseco for half the season and winning the best division in baseball was a tribute to the A's talent, depth and mental fortitude. But to complete their redemption mission, there were still two more hurdles left.

## **1989 ALCS**

The Toronto Blue Jays had survived a tough AL East fight against the Baltimore Orioles. The A's were a solid favorite and that's how the 1989 ALCS played out—the Blue Jays had their share of moments, and led at some point in most games, but Oakland had too much firepower and they took the pennant in five games.

Both teams had their aces ready for Game 1 in Oakland, as Stewart went for the A's and Dave Stieb took the ball for the Blue Jays. It was Toronto who struck first, in the top of the second. George Bell and Tony 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 the Boston Red Sox 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 Lansford singled, stole second with two outs and scored when Parker singled the other way to left field.

One inning later, McGwire hit a leadoff home run and it was tied 3-3. Phillips followed by beating out a bunt and Stieb was removed for reliever Jim 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 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 Stottlemyre 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, Lloyd 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 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, Stottlemyre was pulled for Acker. A ground rule double by Dave Henderson, a sac fly from Hassey and a base hit from 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. Honeycutt had come on from Moore, but allowed a single and two walks to load the bases with none out. Eckersley came on. Fred 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.

Jimmy Key was a reliable lefty for Toronto and on Friday night, his team's season was 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, Canseco and 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 closer Tom 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, Welch for Oakland and Mike 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. 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 the third, Rickey ripped an RBI triple. Stieb got 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-zip.

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 was going back to the Fall Classic.

## 1989 WORLD SERIES

It was a dream come true for the sports fans of the Bay Area when the Oakland A's and San Francisco Giants each won pennants and met in the 1989 World Series. The dream turned into a nightmare when the Loma Prieta earthquake, registering a 7.1 on the Richter scale, rocked the region just prior to Game 3, wreaking terrible damage, taking lives and causing huge human suffering.

The series opened in Oakland and the A's sent Stewart to the mound to face Scott Garrelts. Oakland got on the board in the bottom of the second when Dave Henderson drew a walk, and then with one out, Steinbach and Phillips each singled to make it 1-0 with runners on first and third.

A ground ball out scored Steinbach and moved Phillips up to second. Rickey Henderson finished the rally with a line drive single to right and a quick 3-0 lead.

The A's went to the long ball in the third and fourth inning, when Parker and Weiss each hit leadoff home runs. Stewart took over from there. He threw a complete-game five-hit shutout and Oakland had a 5-0 win.

Moore took the ball on Sunday night, facing San Francisco's Rick Reuschel, and again Oakland jumped out early.

Rickey Henderson drew a leadoff walk to start the home half of the first, stole second and scored on a double by Lansford. In the top of the third, San Francisco finally scored their first run of the Series.

Terry Kennedy singled and then was replaced on the bases by the faster Jose Uribe after a forceout. The unintended switch worked well. Uribe went first to third on a single to left and scored on a sac fly.

In the bottom of the fourth, Oakland all but put it away. Jose Canseco walked and Parker drove him in with a double. Dave Henderson drew a walk, then Steinbach banged a three-run blast. It was 5-1 and Moore took over.

He pitched seven innings of four-hit baseball, and let Honeycutt and Eckersley clean up. The series would shift across the Bay to San Francisco with the A's firmly in command.

The national TV audience was already tuned into ABC as pregame warmups for Game 3 were being concluded. Al Michaels and Tim McCarver were on the air, when the rumbling started. TV viewers heard Michaels say "We're having an earthquake...", and the power went out. This was on October 17. The World Series would not resume until October 27.



When play began it was Stewart facing Garrelts again, as each team re-set its rotation. Oakland picked up where they had left off. Lansford and Canseco each singled with one out in the first, and Dave Henderson hit a two-out double that made it 2-0.

Stewart finally gave up a run in the bottom of the second, when Matt Williams homered. Oakland answered back twice in the top of the fourth, when Dave Henderson and Phillips each hit solo blasts to make it 4-1. In the bottom of the inning, Will Clark and Kevin Mitchell singled and Ken Oberkfell drew a walk. With two outs, Kennedy popped a two-run single and San Francisco wasn't going away, down 4-3.

No one could hold back the A's offense though, and over the next two innings they put another game away. In the fifth, Rickey Henderson and Lansford worked walks and Canseco ripped a three-run blast. Dave Henderson hit the add-on, solo blast. In the top of the sixth, Lansford hit a solo shot.

It was 9-3 and stayed that way until the eighth. Oakland tacked on four more runs, while San Francisco added four of their own in the ninth after Stewart was out. The final was 13-7.

Moore went again for Oakland, while San Francisco manager Roger Craig, looking for anyone who might slow the tide of the A's offense, gave a start to Don Robinson. Nothing worked. Rickey Henderson led Game 4 off with a home run.

In the top of the second, Dave Henderson doubled, and with two outs, Weiss was intentionally walked to bring up Moore. The pitcher doubled and both runs scored. Rickey Henderson singled in Moore and it was quickly 4-zip.

The game got further out of hand in the fifth when Canseco hit a one-out single and Dave Henderson walked. This was followed by a bang-bang sequence of Steinbach tripling and Phillips hitting a double. Now it was 7-0. In the sixth, another run was added on when Rickey Henderson tripled and Lansford singled him home.

But on the way to oblivion, San Francisco rallied. With two outs in the bottom of the sixth, Will Clark singled and Kevin Mitchell homered. It set the stage for a bigger rally in the bottom of the seventh.

Kennedy started it with a walk and Greg Litton homered. Honeycutt came in out of the Oakland bullpen, but he was greeted with a Candy Maldonado triple, a double by Butler and a single from Robby Thompson. Now it was 8-6, there was only one out and the two more feared hitters in the San Francisco lineup—Clark and Mitchell—were at the plate.

Honeycutt, a lefty, stayed on to face the lefty Clark and got the out. Oakland manager Tony LaRussa went to the righthander Burns to face righty Mitchell. The leftfielder who won the NL MVP in 1989, got a hold of one, but it ended up as a fly ball out. The World Series was effectively over. The A's got an insurance run in the top of the eighth, while Burns and Eckersley closed the game without further incident.

Stewart was named World Series MVP. There was a good case to be made for Rickey Henderson, who went 9-for-19 with two walks, a homer and three steals and seemed to be involved in almost every critical Oakland rally. But it's tough to argue against the selection of a pitcher who averaged eight innings in two starts, only gave up a combined three runs and won half the games his team needed.

The A's declined to use champagne in the clubhouse celebration, out of respect for all that their community had suffered over the previous two weeks. They were a worthy champion both on and off the field.

## 1990

The A's came into 1990 as the gold standard of baseball. They had won consecutive American League pennants and the 1989 World Series. They had been particularly dominant in doing so.



They had the game's signature stars. They spent all of 1990 looking ready to claim a special place in history before a shocking ending dented the legacy.

The Bash Brothers had vintage years in 1990. McGwire hit 39 home runs and drove in 108 runs. Canseco's numbers were 37/101. Both had on-base percentages of .370-plus. But the A's were much more.

It was in the small-ball aspects of the game—walks, steals and on-base percentage—where Oakland excelled. No one was better than Rickey Henderson. The leadoff man and future Hall of Famer finished with a .439 OBP and slugged .577. He stole 65 bases, scored 119 runs and popped 28 home runs. He won the AL MVP award.



Oakland's pitching was even better. Stewart was a 22-game winner. Eckersley was a Hall of Fame closer, and his 48 saves and 0.61 ERA rendered him virtually unhittable in 1990. And Welch racked up an astonishing 27-6 record and finished with a 2.95 ERA on his way to the Cy Young Award.

The star talent of Rickey Henderson, Stewart, Welch, Eckersley, McGwire and Canseco was augmented by a bona fide star in the dugout. Manager Tony LaRussa got the most out of the rest of the roster and Oakland finished with the AL's best ERA and its third-most runs scored.

By Memorial Day the A's were 30-12, but they were in a tight race. Chicago and Minnesota were hot on Oakland's heels for the AL West lead, four games back and 5 ½ respectively. No one in the AL East was comparable.

On June 14, Oakland visited the South Side of Chicago. Stewart took the mound on Thursday to open a four-game series. He fell behind 3-0, but settled in the rest of the way. The problem was that in spite of thirteen hits, the A's couldn't get the big knock and they lost 3-2. When they trailed 4-1 in the eighth inning on Friday night, the race was poised to tighten further.

But a four-run rally won that game and it rolled into Saturday night when the offense unloaded for seven runs in the first inning of a 12-3 win. Mike Moore pitched well in Sunday's finale and kept his team in it, trailing 2-1 after seven. McGwire homered to tie it and three consecutive singles gave the A's the lead. Eckersley closed out the 5-2 win.

Oakland had the chance to open up the race further when Chicago came west the following weekend. But the opportunity was missed. The A's scored five runs the entire weekend. Stewart was on the wrong end of another tough 3-2 decision and the White Sox swept the series. By the All-Star break, even though the A's were 51-31, they were only two games up.

August was the decisive month. Oakland went 18-9. Chicago lost four straight to mediocre Baltimore and went into a slump against the rest of the AL East. The A's extended the lead to 6 ½ games by Labor Day and it never got close again.

And at the end of August, Oakland loaded up further for the postseason when they acquired Willie McGee, a former MVP center fielder from St. Louis, who was batting .335 at the time of the trade.

The clinching moment came with a week left in the regular season. With the magic number at two, A's were in Kansas City. Twenty minutes after getting word of a Chicago loss, Stewart put the finishing touches on a complete-game five-hitter.

For the third straight year, the A's had won 100-plus games and won a tough division with room to spare. Baseball fans expected October to serve as the coronation moment for a dynasty.

## 1990 ALCS

For the second time in three years, the Oakland A's met the Boston Red Sox in the American League Championship Series. The result of 1990 was the same as 1988—not only did Oakland win, but they did it in four straight.

Fenway Park was the venue for Saturday night's Game 1. And there was a marquee pitching matchup awaiting the prime-time audience, Stewart against Clemens. Both were 20-game winners in 1990.

The game went according to script, as Stewart and Clemens were in control. Boston got on the board first when Wade Boggs hit a solo blast over the Green Monster in the fourth inning. Oakland threatened in the sixth when Clemens walked the first two batters, before a line drive double play off the bat of Harold Baines killed the threat. It was still a 1-0 game going into the seventh inning when Larry Andersen came on in relief of Clemens.

Andersen promptly walked McGwire. A one-out single by Jamie Quirk put runners on the corners and a sac fly from Rickey Henderson tied the game. Boston manager Joe Morgan tried another reliever, Tom Bolton in the eighth. He gave up a leadoff single to Jose Canseco, who was bunted to second, stole third and scored on Carney Lansford's single to right. The A's had manufactured a 2-1 lead. In the ninth, facing another reliever in Jeff Gray, Oakland unloaded for seven runs and the final score was a deceptive 9-1.

There was now a big dropoff in the Red Sox rotation. Dana Kiecker had a nice year in 1990 with a 3.97 ERA, but having him in a must-win spot wasn't anything Boston fans would have wanted. Oakland just rolled out another ace, sening Welch.

The Red Sox threatened in the second before Tony Pena grounded into a double play. They threatened again in the third when Luis Rivera hit a leadoff double. This time productive outs brought the run around and Boston again had a 1-0 lead.

It only took until the fourth inning for the A's to respond on Sunday night. Wille McGee ripped a leadoff double and scored on a Baines single. In the sixth, they peppered away at Kiecker for four straight singles, but another Baines double-play ball was mixed in there. Reliever Greg Harris was able to escape the inning with no damage. The Red Sox missed their own

opportunity in the bottom of the frame when they loaded the bases with two outs, but Tom Brunansky grounded out.

The combination of the seventh inning and Larry Andersen did Boston in again. Although to be fair, the reliever did come on after Mike Gallego and Rickey Henderson had started the inning with singles. Oakland pushed across the lead run.

The Red Sox looked ready to answer in the bottom of the eighth when Boggs and Ellis Burks singled with one out. Oakland manager Tony LaRussa played matchups—he used the lefty Honeycutt to get Boston’s talented left fielder Mike Greenwell. Then the manager went to Eckersley to strike out Dwight Evans and preserve the 2-1 lead.

The A’s again used the ninth to get some insurance. After McGee bunted his way on and Canseco walked, Baines doubled to right, McGwire singled to left and the score was 4-1. Eckersley made it stand up. Oakland was going home with a 2-0 series lead.

On a Tuesday afternoon in Oakland, the A’s sent Moore to the mound to face the Red Sox’ Mike Boddicker. In the top of the second, Greenwell worked a one-out walk, Evans singled and Brunansky drove in the run with a sac fly. Boston again led 1-0, but given the results thus far, Red Sox Nation could be forgiven if there was any lack of excitement over an early lead.

The pattern of Oakland comebacks continued. Canseco led off the fourth with a walk and Baines singled. McGwire struck out, but a successful double-steal on the third strike had the A’s in business. Dave Henderson tied the game with a sac fly and Willie Randolph delivered a two-out single to make it 2-1.

That was all Moore was going to need, although Boston generously gave up more in the sixth, with two errors and a hit batsman creating two runs and a 4-1 lead. Moore worked into the eighth until the Red Sox put two men aboard and brought Greenwell to the plate as the tying run. LaRussa again went to Honeycutt for the lefty-lefty matchup and again Honeycutt delivered. Eckersley again closed it out. And again, Oakland beat Boston in a postseason game.

Clemens and Stewart came back on short rest for Game 4 the following afternoon, but the Red Sox ace didn’t last long. In the bottom of the second, Lansford singled with one out. Steinbach singled to left and a Greenwell throwing error put the runners on second and third. McGwire’s ground ball out drove in the run. Clemens was in position to get out of it without further damage, but when he walked Willie Randolph, the pitcher lost his cool at home plate umpire Terry Cooney and got himself ejected.

With the Red Sox in the pen surprisingly early, light-hitting Mike Gallego ripped a two-out double that made it 3-0. The Boston relief corps did its job the rest of the way, and Oakland never scored again. But Stewart was simply unhittable. He carried the shutout into the ninth inning before a Burks double and Jody Reed single cut the lead to 3-1 and gave the Red Sox three shots with the tying run at the plate.

Honeycutt came on and promptly got Wade Boggs to ground into a double play. Another ground ball out from Greenwell ended the series. Oakland had its third consecutive American League pennant.

Stewart's two dominant starts made him an easy choice for 1990 ALCS MVP. Oakland also showcased the versatility in its lineup—even though McGwire and Canseco only combined for four hits, they also combined for eight walks. And other bats could do the damage, notably Lansford, who went 7-for-16, along with Baines and Steinbach who had five hits apiece in the four games

## **1990 WORLD SERIES**

The A's seemed to have an encounter with destiny lined up at the 1990 World Series. They were the defending champion, aiming to become the first repeat Series winner in twelve years. They had won three straight American League pennants. They were clearly the most dominant team in baseball and multiple titles would seal their place in baseball's pantheon.

But if the A's had a date with history, the Cincinnati Reds had a date with destiny and their ultimate triumph was arguably the most stunning outcome in the long history of the Fall Classic.

The homefield rotation fell in favor of the National League this year. So the 103-win A's went on the road to old Riverfront Stadium to open up against the 91-win Reds.

Oakland might have been on the road, but they had Stewart ready to roll for Game 1. Cincinnati countered with their own young ace, Jose Rijo. And it didn't take long for the Reds to send a message that they weren't rolling over for anyone.

After Billy Hatcher worked a one-out walk, Cincy's star centerfielder Eric Davis unloaded with a home run to dead center. The Reds had a quick 2-0 lead.

Oakland had action going against Rijo in both the top of the second and the top of the third, getting two on with two out each time. On both occasions, Rijo got the key out, one of them a strikeout of McGwire. It kept the 2-0 lead intact for when the Reds got back to work against Stewart in the bottom of the third.

Again, it started with a walk, this time to Barry Larkin. Hatcher followed with an RBI double. When the throw home allowed Hatcher to take third, he was able to score on Paul O'Neill's ground ball. 4-0 Reds.

Even with Stewart out after four innings, no one in Cincinnati could get comfortable. Over the last three years in the ALCS, the A's had routinely spotted opponents' leads, then rallied back. And they loaded up the bases in the fifth for McGwire. The slugging first baseman missed another opportunity, popping out to end the threat.

In the bottom of the fifth, the Reds blew it open. Hatcher doubled again. O'Neill worked a walk. Davis lined an RBI single into center. After a productive ground ball out moved the runners to

second and third, Cincinnati did what Oakland was not doing tonight—get the big two-out hit. A single from Chris Sabo plated two runs and made it 7-0. That's where Game 1 ended.



The first punch thrown by the Reds was a surprise, but there was no reason for alarm or to doubt the ultimate outcome of this Series. All the A's really needed to do was pick up a road split anyway. And their rotation was deeper. Welch took the mound for Game 2, while Danny Jackson went for Cincinnati.

The A's quickly went to work. Rickey Henderson led off the game with a single and stole second. Lansford bunted him up and a ground ball out from Canseco picked up the run.

McGwire and Dave Henderson each hit two-out singles, but Jackson kept the score at 1-0.

And once again, the Cincinnati bats wasted no time in making themselves heard. Larkin and Hatcher hit back-to-back doubles to start the first. The first Oakland lead of the Series was gone as quickly as it had arrived. Productive outs from O'Neill and Eric Davis gave the Reds a 2-1 lead.

Jackson created his own problem in the top of the second with a throwing error that put a runner on second with no one out, but he pitched around it. The Cincy starter was not so fortunate in the top of the third. Canseco homered to tie the game 2-2. McGwire's single was followed by two walks. There was only one man out. Hassey gave the A's the lead with a sac fly and Gallego's two-out single put Oakland ahead 4-2. Jackson was given the early hook and the inning ended there.

The top of the Cincinnati order was locked in. Larkin and Hatcher immediately answered with a single and double to start the bottom of the third, and there were runners on second and third with no outs. But Welch buckled down. He got O'Neill on a fly ball too shallow to allow the speedy Larkin to tag up from third. Welch got Eric Davis to bounce out back to him. And he got Hal Morris to escape.

Cincinnati did get one run back in the bottom of the fourth. Joe Oliver doubled and veteran utility infielder Ron Oester, batting in the pitcher's spot, came up with the key two-out RBI hit. Jack Armstrong came out of the Reds' bullpen and quieted the A's down with three shutout innings. Welch also settled in. The 4-3 Oakland lead still stood in the bottom of the eighth.

Hatcher wasn't just hitting, he was finding gaps. This time with a leadoff triple. After a walk to O'Neill, Eric Davis got one in the air. But this was another fly ball too short to score a fast runner. LaRussa summoned Honeycutt to face the lefty Morris.

Cincinnati skipper Lou Pinella countered by sending up right handed hitting Glenn Braggs and Braggs was able to deliver the productive out that tied the game.

This was now strength on strength. The Reds' bullpen—the "Nasty Boys" of Rob Dibble, Norm Charlton and Randy Myers was the best part of their team. The A's had Eckersley, the top closer

in the game. Dibble tossed two shutout innings. Eck worked the bottom of the ninth without incident and got the first out in the tenth.

Then utility man Billy Bates, the unlikeliest of possible heroes, beat out a slow roller. A single from Sabo put runners on first and second. And for the second time tonight, Oliver doubled. This one won the game, 5-4.

Cincinnati now had the nation's attention. Hatcher had set a World Series record with seven consecutive hits over these last nights. The Reds led this World Series 2-0 as the action headed west for the weekend.

Moore was Oakland's starter for a Game 3 they now had to play with desperation. Tom Browning was going for Cincinnati. For the third straight game, the Reds started hitting right away in the first inning. But this time, three singles were wrapped around a double-play grounder from Hatcher, so nothing went up on the board.

Sabo led off the second with a home run. The A's countered in their half of the second with a double from Dave Henderson and a two-run blast from Baines to get a 2-1 lead. There was still reason for Oakland fans to feel positive over where this Series might go over the next few days.

But the Baines home run was actually the last time that A's fans could feel really good in the 1990 season. The top of the third was the most stunning moment yet in a Series already filled with unexpected moments.

With one out, a Hatcher single and McGwire error put the Reds in business. Eric Davis singled to tie up the game 2-2. The throw home put runners on second and third and allowed Morris to give Cincy the lead with an RBI groundout. Sabo uncorked his second home run of the night. Suddenly it was 5-2. Todd Benzinger singled and LaRussa was coming to get Moore.

And even though there were two outs, this inning wasn't over. Oliver was turning into a doubles machine, delivering another two-base hit that scored a run. Mariano Duncan's single made it 7-2. Duncan stole second and scored when Larkin tripled. 8-2 Reds.

Rickey Henderson hit a leadoff home run in the bottom of the third, allowing for thoughts that the potent Oakland lineup wouldn't go quietly. But they did. Browning allowed just two hits the rest of the night. The 8-3 score held up.

Saturday night's Rijo-Stewart rematch, with both pitchers on short rest, was now taking place under circumstances no one would have remotely considered. I'm sure that somewhere in the country, some prescient handicapper might have predicted that the Reds would pull the upset in this World Series. No one in their right mind talked about a Cincinnati sweep. But that's what was at hand on Saturday night.

In the bottom of the first, McGee doubled for Oakland. Eric Davis made a noble effort at a sliding catch, but it was a costly one. He tore his kidney in four places. The great player not only had to leave Game 4 and be returned to Cincinnati, but he would never be the same player after the

injury. In a week of baseball where everything otherwise went right for the Reds, this was a decidedly sour note.

McGee was brought around on a two-out base hit from the ever-clutch Lansford. But that was the last hit the Oakland A's would get this season.

Stewart still looked like he might make it stand up. Oliver hit his fourth double of the Series to lead off the third, but Stewart pitched around it. In the top of the sixth, the Reds had runners on the corners and no outs. Stewart got O'Neill to pop out and Morris to hit into a double play. Stewart pitched around another leadoff double in the seventh, this one from Sabo and kept it a 1-0 game. The A's starter had the reputation as a gamer and he lived up to that reputation tonight.

But with Rijo in complete control, it wasn't going to take much. Larkin singled to start the top of the eighth. Herm Winningham dropped down what was supposed to be a sacrifice bunt, but he beat it out. O'Neill bunted and Stewart muffed it. The bases were loaded.

Braggs grounded into a forceout at second, but the tying run came in. Morris had a chance to atone for his missed chance in the sixth. This time, he got the ball in the air. The fly ball to right was deep enough to bring in Winningham. The Reds had barely touched Stewart, but now they led 2-1.

Rijo got the next four hitters out. Myers came out of the Cincinnati bullpen to finish the job. When he got Lansford to pop out to Benzinger behind the first base bag, the improbable Reds upset was complete.

There was no shortage of heroes for the Reds. Sabo went 9-for-16 and homered twice in the Game 3 win that all but sealed the championship. Larkin and Oliver had six hits apiece over the four games. Dibble and Myers combined to work nearly eight innings of shutout ball. But the debate over the 1990 World Series MVP really came down to two men—Hatcher and Rijo.

Both had Series that were better than any number of players who have won MVP down through the years. Hatcher went 9-for-12 with five extra base hits. Rijo beat Stewart twice and allowed just one run to the most feared lineup in the sport over 15-plus innings. If I had a vote, I would have leaned Hatcher, given how many of his hits came in the first two games when the Reds were taking surprise control of this Series. But I have no issue with the people who actually did have votes choosing Rijo for the honor.

The history of major league baseball is filled with postseason upsets. If Cincinnati had won this Series in a riveting seven games, it would be one of many postseason surprises. But the Reds won the Series in a sweep. Two of the games were blowouts. This was simply a turn of events no one could have foreseen. It's what makes the 1990 World Series not just one of the great upsets in baseball history, but one of the great championship upsets in all of professional sports.

**1991**

Canseco was as good as ever in 1991, hitting 44 home runs and finishing with 122 RBI. The table-setter, Rickey Henderson had a vintage year himself, with a .400 on-base percentage and 58 steals. But McGwire was a different story—he fell off sharply and only slugged .383.

The offense was still fifth in the American League in runs scored and good enough to win. But pitching, the real crown jewel of the Oakland Dynasty, took a big step backward in 1991. Stewart struggled to a 5.18 ERA in 35 starts. Welch had won 27 games and the Cy Young Award in 1990, but his 35 starts saw him post a mediocre 4.58 ERA.

Eckersley was still a Hall of Fame closer and saved 43 games with a 2.96 ERA. But the rest of the bullpen, a big strength in the pennant years, also fell off. Eck wasn't enough to save the staff from falling to 13<sup>th</sup> in the AL in ERA.



Oakland still played good, consistent baseball through the first four months of the season. They were 26-17 on Memorial Day. They slipped a bit in the early summer, but were still 44-38 at the All Star break and within 2 ½ games of the lead in a packed five-team race.

It was the Twins who started to emerge from the pack. By the start of August, the seven head-to-head games the A's had with the Twins were looming large.

Oakland hosted Minnesota for a three-game series on the first weekend of August, with the A's three games off the lead. They grabbed the Friday night opener 3-1, as Welch went the distance and outdueled Twins' ace Jack Morris. When Oakland came back the next afternoon and led 5-0 after seven innings, it looked like this race was about to get even tighter.

Instead, the eighth inning on August 3 proved to be the demarcation point where Oakland's season began to run out of steam. The Twins unloaded for seven runs and won the game 8-6. Stewart pitched the Sunday finale, but gave up three quick runs and lost 6-2.

The A's slid five games out, but with four games in the old Metrodome two weeks later, there was still an opportunity to close the gap. In the opener, Canseco broke up a 2-2 tie in the ninth with a two-run blast. Eckersley gave it back in the bottom of the ninth and Oakland lost in twelve innings.

Welch and Morris rematched on Saturday and the A's grabbed three runs in the first. Welch promptly imploded and the A's ended up on the wrong end of a 12-4 rout. It was more of the same on Sunday—despite a 4-1 lead in the seventh behind Stewart, the Twins touched the Oakland ace for two runs, then beat Honeycutt in the eighth.

Oakland finally won the Monday finale, although even that was an adventure—after going ahead 6-0 behind a three-run jack from Rickey Henderson, they had to hold on for an 8-7 win. Regardless, at seven games out and with the Twins coming on strong, the push for a fourth



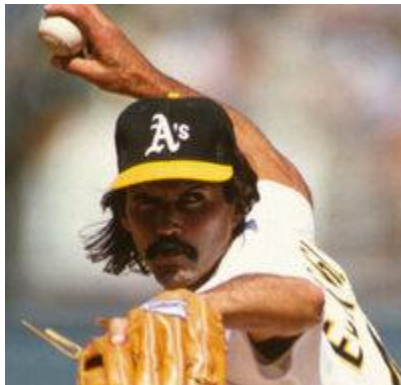
straight pennant was all but over. The A's limped to the finish line and ended up 84-78, in fourth place and eleven games back of Minnesota, who went on to win the World Series.

The mighty Oakland A's were down, but they weren't finished.

## 1992

The 1992 Oakland A's were a group of proud veterans making one last run together. Oakland came at opponents with deep pitching. Stewart and Welch, cornerstone arms of the pennant runs, were still good at age 35. Ron Darling, a key part of the New York Mets' 1986 championship team, was now out west. This trio all had ERAs in the 3s. Moore's was a little higher, at 4.12, but the right-hander won 17 games.

The bullpen was even deeper. LaRussa got the most out of a crew that included 38-year-old Honeycutt and 40-year-old Goose Gossage. Jim Horsman, Vince Corsi and Jeff Parretts rounded out the setup team that served as the bridge between the rotation and the ninth inning.



And if Oakland got to the ninth inning with the lead? It was as good as over. At the age of 37, Eckersely saved 51 games, posted a 1.91 ERA and swept both the Cy Young and MVP awards in the American League.

Offensively, the A's finished with the same rank as the pitching staff—fourth in the American League. The lineup was a little more top-heavy dependent on a few key parts. Rickey Henderson was 33-years-old, but the leadoff man could still fly. He finished with an on-base percentage of .412 and stole 48 bases. McGwire hit 42 home runs with a .385 OBP and

finished fourth in the MVP voting.

A player that's forgotten is tough second baseman Mike Bordick, whose .358 OBP at the second base spot was invaluable. It helped at least partially offset a mediocre year from left fielder Jose Canseco, something the front office would move aggressively to address in the late summer.

Oakland played steady baseball in the early going and reached Memorial Day with a 26-17 record, good for a 1 ½ game lead in the AL West.

The A's got hot in the first part of June. They scored 22 runs in a sweep of Boston and nudged the division lead out to four games. The second part of the month saw Oakland give the advantage back. They lost three of four at home to the Twins, the last two by scores of 12-2 and 10-2 in an ugly weekend of baseball at Alameda County Coliseum. When the All-Star break arrived, the A's were two games behind the defending champs.

August was the defining month. Oakland went 19-10 and took control of the AL West, spurting out to a 6 ½ game lead. On the final day of the month, they were playing a contending Baltimore

Orioles team. Canseco was in the on-deck circle in the first inning when he was summoned back to the dugout. He'd been traded to Texas.

It was a shocking move, but the A's got a good package in return. Ruben Sierra was an offensive force in the outfield. Bobby Witt was a power right-hander that gave the rotation another arm. Witt would make six starts down the stretch and post a 3.41 ERA. Jeff Russell gave LaRussa another weapon out of the bullpen and he pitched scoreless baseball in nine innings of September work.

Even so, the move clearly shocked a team that had taken control of a good division. Oakland was shut out that night by Baltimore and lost five of seven immediately following the trade. Minnesota pulled within 4 ½ games.

In those days, when the A's *really* needed a win, there was no one more reliable than Stewart. So it was on September 9 when he took the mound in Anaheim. Stewart pitched seven innings of two-hit baseball, outdueling talented Angels' lefty Mark Langston. Russell and Eckersely cleaned up the last two innings.

That game was the final turning point of the season. Oakland's divisional lead began trending back upward and the race never got tighter. The A's clinched with a week to go. They were going back to the American League Championship Series.

## 1992 ALCS

The Blue Jays and A's were now old hands at postseason baseball by the time they met in the 1992 ALCS. In addition to 1989, the Blue Jays had also been to this round in 1985 and 1991. But while Oakland was a proven champion, Toronto had yet to get to a World Series. The Blue Jays faced pressure to rectify that. As for the A's, their comeback season made them a feel-good story and they already had a championship on the resume. Oakland could play with nothing to lose.

Toronto's Jack Morris and 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. Baines singled, and that was followed by home runs from McGwire and Steinbach for a 3-0 lead. The Blue Jays chipped back in the middle innings on solo blasts from Pat Borders and Dave 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 Dave Winfield. Stewart was removed for Jeff Russell, but the setup man couldn't stop John 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.

Toronto had acquired David Cone at the trade deadline and this kind of virtual must-win game at home on Thursday night was the reason why. He squared off with 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. Kelly 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 Sierra. Tom Henke, the closer, 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 Darling to face Toronto's talented young 16-game winner Juan Guzman.

An early error by Lansford resulted in a Blue Jay run and a fourth-inning home run by Roberto 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. Jays' right fielder Joe Carter threw him out at the plate. Toronto had turned back a potentially big inning and then immediately got a solo blast from Candy 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. Alas, Henke got Baines to ground out. Toronto added one more insurance run off 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 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 Toronto's Duane 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.

For the A's, this series was the end of the age. The stars moved on and the franchise began to rebuild. Oakland. The Bash Brothers era was now a part of history.