



## RED SOX RENEWAL

1985-91 At Fenway Park



The first part of the 1980s were mostly quiet ones in the otherwise raucous world of Boston Red Sox baseball. After a run through the 1970s where the Sox raised hopes, broke hearts and were wildly entertaining, the early part of the eighties saw the franchise say goodbye to the great Carl Yastrzemski and get ready for a renewal. That renewal arrived in the latter part of the decade, another era where Boston frequently played into October, raised hopes...and also broke hearts.

Wade Boggs had become an established star in the retooling years. Jim Rice and Dwight Evans were holdovers from the electric 1970s offenses. What the Red Sox needed was pitching. It was 1985 when a new name came rocketing onto the Fenway scene.

Roger Clemens emerged in the starting rotation. The 1985 season proved to be better than anyone expected. And in 1986, the Red Sox took off. It was that '86 team that won a surprise AL East title and an epic American League Championship Series...before coming up short in a World Series that would take the first place in the franchise's long litany of heartbreaks.

Even though the high point of the era came early, the Red Sox continued to be a contender for five more years. They won AL East titles in 1988 and 1990. They made a noble run at another one in 1991.

Each season in the seven-year period of *Red Sox Renewal* has its own article published individually on TheSportsNotebook.com, as do the four postseason series the Sox played in during this era. The 11 articles are pulled together and edited to create a cohesive compilation.

They're all here. From Boggs to Clemens, from Dewey to Rice. From Morgan Magic to the Boddicker trade, from Burks to Greenwell. *Red Sox Renewal* takes you through a unique era of baseball at Fenway Park.

## 1985

The 1985 Boston Red Sox showed the flashes of hope that would ultimately manifest themselves into a pennant a year later, but the '85 team was done in by an August collapse.



Boston had the third-best offense in the American League in 1985, and unlike previous Red Sox teams, this wasn't done with power. They had the top batting average in the league, and the top on-base percentage, with Boggs leading the way. Boggs hit .368 and produced an OPB of .450.

Gedman was coming into his own, with an OBP of .362 and a slugging percentage of .484. The same was true for Marty Barrett at second, with his .336 OBP. Bill Buckner hit .299 and drove in 110 runs. Rice and Evans were still producing at the corner outfield spots, combining for 56 home runs and 181 RBIs.

The disappointments on offense were the decline of designated hitter Mike Easler, and centerfielder Tony Armas. The latter had hit 43 home runs in 1984, but ended up sharing time in centerfield with Steve Lyons. Armas hit 23 home runs in 103 games, but his problems getting on base and those at-bats when he wasn't going deep were just becoming too numerous.

Pitching was generally the problem in Boston through the early part of the 1980s. There were clear signs of progress in 1985. The staff was by no means the team strength, but at sixth in the AL in ERA, they weren't bad. Oil Can Boyd won 15 games with a 3.70 ERA and Clemens continued to be slowly broken into the majors, going 7-5 with a 3.29 ERA. Al Nipper, Bob Ojeda and Hurst were serviceable starters. It was the bullpen that completely lacked depth, with no one recording more than 12 saves.

The season started in the best way possible, a three-game sweep of the New York Yankees at Fenway Park, the last of which saw Clemens get the win and Stanley pitch three shutout innings of relief. In spite of this, Boston still started 16-17, though they were within four games of the Toronto Blue Jays in the AL East. The Red Sox then lost seven of nine to mediocre teams in the Cleveland Indians, Minnesota Twins and Texas Rangers to fall ten back by Memorial Day.

Just when you were ready to write the season off, Boston came surging back. They won 10 of 11, and were within 6 ½ games of Toronto as the Blue Jays came to town for a four-game weekend set. The four days at Fenway rejuvenated hope for 1985.

In Thursday's opener, Boston trailed 6-2 in the fifth. Boggs hit a two-run homer to cut the deficit in half and then later walked and scored in a rally that pushed the Red Sox to an 8-7 win. On Friday, Boyd scattered 11 hits, going the distance in a 4-1 win.

Saturday's game was a pendulum of emotions. The Red Sox first coughed up a 5-1 lead in the eighth, then immediately scored twice. The winning rally came thanks to four walks, with Gedman and Barrett drawing free passes with the bases loaded. Boston won 7-5. One more rally was ahead on Sunday. Trailing 6-3 in the eighth, the Red Sox scored four times. Glenn Hoffman, the light-hitting utility infielder, tied it with a two-run single and Evans won the game with a sac fly.

Boston was soaring, within 2 ½ games of the lead. Just when you were ready to say this might be the year, the Red Sox immediately did a U-turn back in the wrong direction.

With ruthless "consistency", the Red Sox dropped two of three in succession to the Detroit Tigers, on the return trip to Toronto and to the Baltimore Orioles. Boston closed June back in a 7 ½ game hole.

The Red Sox treaded water throughout July, and then collapsed in August. They went 8-21 through the month, including seven consecutive losses to the Yankees. New York and Toronto would battle to the wire for the division crown, with the Blue Jays ultimately winning.

If you were looking for hope though, Boston didn't quit on their new manager. They played hard through September and went 19-9. Whether that had a carryover effect to the following year is debatable, but it was a good sign that McNamara didn't lose the clubhouse in the bad times. And the good times were right around the corner.

## 1986



Clemens came through in 1986 with a year that was not only a breakout campaign, but also the best season of his career. He won his first thirteen decisions and finished the season 24-4. His ERA was 2.48. On April 29, at home against Seattle, he struck out twenty batters. He won both the Cy Young and MVP awards, a feat that would not be duplicated until Justin Verlander did it for Detroit in 2012.

Clemens was easily the biggest reason a pitching staff not known for success and having to work in hitter-friendly Fenway Park finished fourth in the American League in ERA.

There were other good young arms. Boyd was 26-years-old and posted a 3.78 ERA in his thirty starts. Hurst had a 2.99 ERA. Depth was a problem but in June, the Red Sox traded Lyons in exchange for the great Tom Seaver. “Tom Terrific” was 41-years-old, but he had a championship pedigree that was badly needed in Boston and over 16 starts he finished with a 3.80 ERA.

An offseason trade aimed at the bullpen didn’t work out as well as planned. The Red Sox traded a reliable lefty in Bob Ojeda to the Mets as part of an eight-player deal whose highlights for Boston were young arms Wes Gardner and Calvin Schiraldi. Even though Schiraldi came on strong down the stretch—a 1.41 ERA—he still only worked 51 innings and Gardner was a non-factor. Meanwhile, Ojeda pitched well in Queens and the disparity of this trade would really be laid bare when the teams met in the World Series.

And until Schiraldi got rolling, the rest of the pen was staffed by mediocre arms. Bob Stanley, Sammy Stewart and Joe Sambito all had some great high points in their careers, but none finished with an ERA under 4.00 in 1986.

Even so, the quality of the starting pitching combined with the traditional Boston bats to make a winner. The Red Sox offense would rank fifth in the American League in runs scored and they were led by Boggs. The 28-year-old third baseman hit .357 and won his third batting title in four years. He also slugged .486, peppering the Green Monster with extra base hits.

Rice was 33-years-old, but the one-time AL MVP (1978) was still producing. He hit .324 and drove in 110 runs. Evans hit 26 home runs, drove in 97 runs and posted a .376 on-base percentage. Barrett was coming into his own and finished with a .353 OBP.

There were disappointments in the lineup. Gedman did not have a good year behind the plate, center fielder Tony Armas didn’t age as well as Rice and Evans, and shortstop Rey Quinones was a big offensive liability. The Red Sox made an August deal to get a modest upgrade at short in Spike Owen and added Dave Henderson to the outfield, an acquisition that would pay huge dividends in October. But the biggest and best trade the 1986 Boston Red Sox made came just before spring training ended.

It was the Friday before the Final Four began, and while the nation might have been thinking about Louisville, Duke, Kansas and LSU, the Red Sox were talking a deal with their ancient rivals in the Bronx. Each team had a productive designated hitter—left handed hitting Mike Easler for the Red Sox and right handed hitting Don Baylor for the Yankees. Each would be better served by switching parks, Easler to hit at Yankee Stadium’s short right field porch, and Baylor to take aim at the Green Monster.

In another era, ownership of these same teams had discussed swapping Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams for the same reasons, and according to legend that seems well-founded, even agreed to it during a heavy night of drinking before recanting in the morning. Easler-for-Baylor wasn’t quite on *that* level, but it had an impact.

Easler remained a productive player in New York, but Baylor had a clubhouse presence that would be invaluable for a Red Sox team living in a city haunted by its history. And he was awfully good at the plate, hitting 31 home runs and finishing with 94 RBI.

After starting the season 9-8, Boston took advantage of a long stretch of games against the weaker AL West, going 19-6. By Memorial Day, the Red Sox were 28-14 and had the second-best record in baseball behind the Mets. But Boston was only a half-game better than the Yankees in the AL East and the race looked to be on.

The Red Sox surged in the early summer and owned their division rivals. They swept a home-and-home with the Indians, going 6-0. They took two of three from defending AL East champ Toronto. They won three straight in New York, scoring 22 runs in the process and winning a Clemens-Ron Guidry showdown in a 10-1 rout.

By the All-Star break, Boston was rolling at 56-31 and had some separation in the race, plus-seven games on the Yankees, with the Indians, Orioles and Blue Jays all hoping to make a run.

The city of Boston flew into a panic when the Sox lost 10 of 13 on a road trip against the AL West. By the end of July, the Yankees and Orioles had the lead cut under five games, while the Blue Jays and Tigers were only 5 ½ out. The Indians were 6 ½ back. It was at this time that Boston Globe columnist Dan Shaughnessy wrote that the Red Sox were the only team that could be mathematically eliminated while still in first place.

But the clubhouse, led by Baylor, didn't panic. Having Seaver in the rotation was also a boon, and he opened a three-game series in Detroit on August 8 with a complete-game five-hitter. The Red Sox swept a series that Clemens didn't pitch in, scoring 23 runs in the process. The race was still close, but Boston stabilized. On Labor Day, they were 3 ½ games up on the Blue Jays and 6 ½ up on the Yanks.



There were thirteen games against either New York or Toronto in the final month. New England was battening down the hatches for a fight to the finish. Instead, something completely unexpected happened. Boston took the bull by the horns.

They swept three-game sets against Texas & Minnesota and took three of four in Baltimore. By the time September 11 arrived and the big sequence of games began, the Red Sox were running away with the AL East, nine games up on Toronto and ten games ahead of New York.

Even though Boston went 4-9 in those games, it didn't matter. The Blue Jays had been swept by the Yankees, while New York struggled in two series against Oakland, enabling the Red Sox to pull away.

On September 28, the penultimate Sunday of the season, Boston clinched against Toronto. Oil Can Boyd threw a complete-game and Barrett's three hits led an offensive barrage that produced a 12-3 win. The Red Sox were going back to the playoffs.

The most dramatic postseason in baseball history awaited the Fenway Faithful. That's what the 1986 Boston Red Sox are most remembered for in ways both good and bad. But they should also be remembered as the team that turned back challenges throughout the summer, blew a race open and won a division title that seemed to come out of nowhere.

## **1986 ALCS**

One team was one of baseball's history-laden franchises, the other an expansion team. But they were united by a shared heritage of heartbreak. The Boston Red Sox and California Angels met at the 1986 ALCS and it was inevitable that somebody's fan base would be crushed when it was over. In a rare turnabout for the pre-2004 era it was the Red Sox who snatched victory from the jaws of defeat rather than the other way around.

Boston and California had each pulled away from their respective divisions and made September anticlimactic. Homefield advantage was determined on a rotation basis rather than merit, so there was really nothing to do for the last couple weeks of the regular season other than point to this showdown.

The series opened on a Tuesday night in Fenway Park, and it was a matchup of aces. Clemens went for the Red Sox against the Angels' Mike Witt, who finished third in the Cy Young voting. And to the surprise of the Fenway crowd, this was Witt's night.

In the top of the second, Clemens issued a pair of walks and then in rapid succession, Ruppert Jones singled, Wally Joyner doubled and Brian Downing singled to left. It was suddenly 4-0. In the top of the third, California had some more two-out magic. After an error by Spike Owen, the Angels got hits from Bob Boone and Gary Pettis and the lead was 5-0.

Witt was in command and not until the sixth did the Red Sox get on the board. Owen drew a walk, Boggs beat out an infield hit and Barrett took a single the other way to right. But it was not the sign of an impending comeback. Witt finished off a complete-game five-hitter with no further damage. Clemens worked into the eighth, sparing the bullpen, but the Angels tacked on another couple runs in the 8-1 win.

Hurst got the ball for the Red Sox on Wednesday night who faced a virtual must-win on their homefield. Kirk McCaskill was on the mound for the Angels. This time it was Boston who came out on the attack. In the bottom of the first, Boggs led off with a triple and Barrett doubled him home. In the bottom of the second, Gedman and Owen singled and Boggs beat out another infield hit.

The bases were loaded with one out. Barrett popped a single to left and it was 2-0. McCaskill escaped further damage by getting Buckner to bounce back to the mound and start a double

play. California took advantage by tying the game up in the middle innings. Downing and Doug DeCinces opened with singles. A Boggs error and an infield hit by Dick Schofield brought in a run. One inning later Joyner homered to make it 2-2.



Boston got the lead back in the bottom of the frame when Buckner singled, Baylor worked out a two-out walk and Evans doubled in the lead run. In the seventh, the Red Sox got real separation. After an error by second baseman Bobby Grich, Rice singled and Baylor walked. Another error, this one by DeCinces at third, made the game 4-2.

McCaskill looked ready to get out of it when he got a ground ball to second that looked like a double play. California got the out at second, but Schofield's throw to first went awry and two more runs scored. McCaskill was done and so were the Angels. Hurst gave up eleven hits, but finished the game because Joyner's home run was the only one that went for extra bases. The Red Sox tacked on three runs in the eighth for good measure, keyed by Rice's two-run homer. The final

was 9-2.

An anticipated series had opened with two blowouts. At the very least, the routs had gone both ways, so there was room for excitement to build. And the three games out in Anaheim would be a building crescendo of drama.

Boyd got the Game 3 start and faced off with John Candelaria, a veteran of the Pittsburgh Pirates 1979 World Series champions. Boston got an early run in the second, but a baserunning error prevented a bigger inning. Rice led off with a walk and Baylor singled, but the lefthanded Candelaria picked Baylor off of first. Subsequent singles by Evans and Gedman only resulted in one run.

The Angels threatened in the fourth, putting runners on first and second with two outs. DeCinces then beat out an infield single to first, but Joyner tried to score all the way from second. Buckner wasn't buying and threw him out at the plate. The Red Sox blew a bigger opportunity in the top of the fifth, failing to score after getting men on second and third with none out. Owens grounded to first, but failed to score the run, Barrett popped out and Candelaria escaped.

California finally tied it up in the sixth. Joyner drew a walk and moved up on a ground ball. Hurst faced an old Boston nemesis, DH Reggie Jackson, who singled to tie the game. In the seventh, the Angels' contact hitters displayed some muscle. The diminutive Schofield homered with two outs. After Bob Boone singled, speedy Gary Pettis also went deep. The Angels suddenly had a 4-1 lead.

The Red Sox made a move in the eighth when Barrett led off with a single. Rice drilled out a two-out double that spelled the end of the night for Candelaria. California manager Gene Mauch went to his closer, Donnie Moore, who promptly balked in a run. After issuing a walk to Evans, Moore surrendered a base hit to Gedman that cut the lead to 4-3.

With two runners still on base Moore got the game's biggest out, when Armas flew out to center. California got an insurance run in the eighth when Jackson drew a walk, went all the way to third on a Boggs error and scored on a sac fly by Jones. Moore closed the ninth without incident and the 5-3 win put the Angels halfway to a pennant.

The significant downside that came out of the game for California was that Joyner would no longer be available. The first baseman and Rookie of the Year suffered a staph infection after Game 2 and while he tried to play in Game 3, it wasn't working and he was out for the remainder of the ALCS.

The Red Sox turned to Clemens on three days' rest to even the series. The Angels, in the stronger position for the series, and having a future Hall of Famer in veteran Don Sutton available, kept on their normal rotation.

Clemens and Sutton traded zeroes for three innings in the prime-time game. In the top of the fourth, Boston missed a chance. Boggs led off with a double and Barrett bunted him up. But a Buckner fly ball wasn't deep enough and Sutton escaped. The Red Sox got another chance in the sixth and cashed in. Armas started it with a single, Owen dropped down a sac bunt and with two outs, Buckner ultimately redeemed himself with an RBI single.

Sutton left after seven excellent innings and Vern Ruhle came on. But the bottom of the order was causing problems. Owen singled, took second on a ground ball out and eventually scored on a base hit from Barrett. Chuck Finley came out of the Angel bullpen, but was let down by a pair of errors that resulted in Barrett scoring. Mauch, emptying his bullpen to try and keep it close, went to Doug Corbett, who struck out Baylor with two outs and two on.

I still recall this Saturday night. A high school sophomore who was playing poker in a room separate from the TV set, I was walking back and forth and confidently reported to the other teenage card players that "the series is tied." It would be a premature call.

Clemens, after a magnificent night, gave up a leadoff home run to DeCinces. With one out, consecutive singles from veteran pinch-hitter George Hendrick and Schofield, got the Red Sox ace out of the game. Manager John McNamara went to closer Calvin Schiraldi. Pettis greeted him with an RBI double that made it 3-2 and put runners on second and third.

After an intentional walk to Jones, Schiraldi came up with a big strikeout of Grich that looked ready to save the game. But with two outs, the closer plunked Downing. The score was tied and Reggie was coming to the plate. If nothing else, Schiraldi didn't let the longtime New England nemesis deliver the final blow and Jackson grounded to second. But it merely delayed what looked like a fatal loss.



Schiraldi was still on the eleventh, as the Boston offense could get nothing going in extra innings. Angels' catcher Jerry Narron singled and was bunted up by Pettis. Grich redeemed himself with a line drive single to left that won the game and put California on the brink of a pennant. With Witt ready to go on full rest for Sunday afternoon, and Clemens having been beaten twice, there seemed little hope left for the Red Sox.

Boston still came out strong, with Rice singling in the second inning and Gedman hitting a two-out home run. Hurst, on short rest, escaped a jam in the innings' bottom half pitching around a leadoff double by DeCinces and keeping the score 2-0. But the Boston bats fell silent, as Witt began cruising through the lineup. And California cut the lead in half on a solo shot by Boone in the third. They took the lead in the sixth when DeCinces hit a two-out double and Grich homered to make it 3-2.

The Angels appeared to all but sew up the pennant in the seventh. Hendrick legged out an infield hit. After a sac bunt by Boone, Pettis drew a walk and a double by Rob Wilfong put California up 5-2. There were just six outs left and Witt worked the eighth without incident.

Witt took the mound to open the ninth and quickly got into trouble. Buckner singled to center. After Rice struck out, Baylor homered and now it was 5-4. Witt recovered to get Evans to pop out and Angels Stadium was ready to celebrate. With the left handed hitting Gedman at the plate, Mauch decided to engage in situational managing and brought in lefty Gary Lucas.

This managerial decision has been the subject of considerable controversy, pulling your ace with one out to go and no one on base. In Mauch's defense, Gedman had homered earlier and another one would tie the game. And the fact Baylor had already homered this inning suggested Witt was just hanging on. But when Lucas hit Gedman with a pitch, it seemed a useless change.

Mauch summoned the righthanded Moore to face Boston's Dave Henderson. The count ran 2-2. One strike from elimination, Henderson homered on the next pitch. The Red Sox had a stunning 6-5 lead.

This is the moment when most recollection of the 1986 ALCS basically shuts down and the eventual Boston triumph seemed inevitable. It didn't actually play out that way on late Sunday afternoon. The Angels rallied against the Red Sox bullpen in the ninth.

Boone led off with a single. Ruppert Jones came in to pinch run for the aging catcher and was bunted to second. McNamara played his own righty-lefty game and removed Bob Stanley, opting for lefty Joe Sambito to face Wilfong. It didn't work. Wilfong singled and the game was tied.

McNamara went back to the pen, going for righty Steve Crawford. He allowed a single to Schofield, sending Wilfong to third with the winning run and only one out. Downing was intentionally walked. DeCinces came to the plate and got a fly ball to right...but not deep enough to score. The agony of the Angels only increased when Grich hit a line drive, but right back at Crawford. The Red Sox had escaped the ninth inning not once, but twice and it was 6-6 as Sunday afternoon wore on.

Boston missed a chance in the tenth, as Rice grounded into a double play with runners on the corners and one out. Moore was still in the game in the top of the eleventh. Baylor was hit by a pitch and Evans singled. Gedman dropped down a bunt and beat it out. The bases were loaded with none out. Henderson—who else—hit a sac fly that made it 7-6. Even though no further damage resulted, this one was finally over. Schiraldi came in for the Red Sox and closed it out.

The Red Sox were flying high as the teams went back east, with a day off on Monday and resuming play on Tuesday. The Angels had to try and reclaim some momentum and they got right at it against Boyd.

After Jones worked a walk, Jackson and DeCinces hit back-to-back doubles for a quick 2-0 lead. But the Red Sox countered with a soft rally. Boggs and Barrett each worked full-count walks off McCaskill. A productive groundout, a passed ball and another productive ground ball tied the game.

In the third inning, Boston leveled McCaskill. Owens and Boggs singled to lead it off. Barrett doubled and Buckner singled to make it 4-2. Barrett tried to score on a ground ball to third off the bat of Rice, but was thrown out at the plate. But with runners on first and second, Baylor singled to the opposite field. In an attempt to make another play at home, the relay throw went wild and both runs scored, while Baylor went to third. Evans smacked a single to center making it 7-2 and ending McCaskill's night.

California tried to rally in the fourth, putting the first two men on base. Boyd reached back to strike out Boone and Pettis and there were no runs. The Red Sox added to the lead in the fifth. After Baylor was hit by a pitch, Evans and Gedman singled, setting up an RBI ground ball by Henderson. Even though Boggs ultimately killed the rally with a double-play, it wouldn't really matter. The Angels got a solo home run from Downing in the seventh and an unearned run in the ninth, but even those were sandwiched around a two-run triple by Owen. The final was 10-4 and it was all coming down to a seventh game.

The Red Sox had Clemens available for a third start, while the Angels would turn to Candelaria. Even without Witt, you still had to like the pitching option for California. Candelaria had some big-game mojo from 1979 and had pitched a shutout in Game 6 of the World Series in Baltimore, a game his Pirates faced elimination in. But October 15 in Fenway wouldn't work out quite as well.

In the bottom of the second, an error by Schofield started the rally. It was followed by a base hit from Baylor, a walk to Evans and an RBI groundout from Gedman. With two outs, Boggs slapped a two-run single and it was 3-0.

Boston missed a chance in the third, when a Baylor double keyed a second and third situation with one out. But Evans couldn't pick up the RBI and Candelaria escaped. But the roof finally fell in on the Angels in the fourth.

A fly ball off the bat of Henderson turned into an error by Pettis and Henderson ended up on third. Owens singled in the run. After a walk and two outs, Rice came to the plate. He smashed

a three-run homer sending Fenway into a frenzy and at 7-0, this American League Championship Series was all but over.

Evans tacked on another home run in the seventh and Clemens pitched seven innings of four-hit ball and left after an eighth-inning single that the Angels turned into a meaningless run. The 8-1 final sent the Red Sox to the World Series for the first time since 1975. And it would be another chapter to the Angel history of heartbreak.

Barrett was named ALCS MVP, going 11-for-30. Other good contributors were Owen, whose 9-for-21 was a boon to the lineup out of the 9-hole. Gedman had ten hits and Baylor added nine of his own. On the Angel side, Boone went 10-for-22 and had the team closed it out in Game 5, Witt would almost certainly have been named series MVP.

The most notable struggle came from McCaskill, an integral part of the California rotation all year, but who only worked nine innings combined in his two starts and gave up 13 runs. And the loss of Joyner is a big what-might-have-been for Angels fans.

This American League Championship Series was just one-third of the most incredible October baseball has ever seen. The NLCS provided similar high-stakes drama between the Mets and Astros. And the World Series that was coming has a unique place in the game's history

## 1986 WORLD SERIES

The 1986 World Series is one of the games' historic battles, thanks to an ill-fated groundball that skipped through the legs of Buckner. But the battle between the Mets and Red Sox had more—it had early twists of fate, a Game 7 itself that was dramatic and the entire Game 6 run-up to the Buckner error.



The World Series opened on a Saturday night in Shea Stadium, with the Mets' Ron Darling—the current Turner Broadcasting postseason analyst who also does Mets games during the season—against Hurst. Both pitchers would dominate.

New York missed an early opportunity in the third, putting runners on first and second with one out, before Hurst got Keith Hernandez and Gary Carter to kill the threat. No one else threatened until the top of the seventh when the Red Sox made a move, with considerable help from the Mets.

Rice drew a walk, took second on a wild pitch and scored on an error by New York second baseman Tim Teufel, in for starter Wally Backman only because Hurst was a lefty and Teufel was a right-handed bat. This softest of runs was all that was needed. The teams combined for just nine hits and all were singles. Boston's 1-0 win gave them an early hold on the series.

The Red Sox could now give the ball to their ace. Clemens faced off with New York's Dwight Gooden, who had won the Cy Young in 1985 and enjoyed a strong year in '86.

Pitching continued to dominate through two innings as neither team could get a hit. In the top of the third, it was Gooden who blinked first.

Owen worked a walk. Clemens came to the plate and dropped down a bunt. An error by Hernandez left both runners on. The top of the order came up and in succession, Wade Boggs doubled, Marty Barrett singled and Buckner singled. It was 3-0 and there were still two on with none out. Rice's fly ball to right field moved Barrett to third base, but Gooden buckled down to strike out Evans and Gedman and keep the score as is.

New York bounced right back in the bottom of the third, scoring its first runs of the Series and they also started with the bottom of the order. Rafael Santana singled and Gooden beat out his bunt. Leadoff man Lenny Dykstra sacrificed again to put runners on second and third. A single by Backman scored one run and a RBI ground ball from Hernandez scored another to cut the lead to 3-2.

Over the next two innings, the Red Sox broke it open. Henderson led off the top of the fourth with a home run. In the fifth, Rice started with a single and Evans hit a two-run blast. It was 6-2 and everything was set up for Clemens, but he couldn't get settled in. In the bottom of the fifth, he issued a walk to Backman and Hernandez singled. McNamara pulled the trigger and pulled his ace before he could qualify for the win.

Reliever Steve Crawford gave up a run-scoring single to Gary Carter, but was able to strike out Darryl Strawberry and keep the score 6-3. The Mets stopped hitting and the Red Sox kept going. In the top of the seventh Boston got five straight singles, with Rice, Evans, Gedman, Henderson and Owen all coming in succession. Two runs came in. Another was tacked on in the ninth.

The Red Sox finished the game with 18 hits, double the combined output of *both* teams from Game 1. Every starter had a hit, seven of the eight position players had multiple hits, six drove in runs and six scored runs. It was a complete team emasculation of Gooden in the 9-3 win.

Only once before in history had a team lost two straight at home to open the Series and then gone on to win it. And the first time had come in 1985, when the Kansas City Royals did it against the St. Louis Cardinals. What were the odds it was going to happen two years in a row? The Mets were in serious trouble as the Series went to Fenway for games on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday night. It was Ojeda on the mound as the Mets tried realistically to save their season in Game 3.

And the New York offense came out on the attack against Boyd. Dykstra opened the game with a home run to rightfield. After Backman and Hernandez singled, Carter doubled to score another run and set up second and third. With one out, Danny Heep singled both runs in and Ojeda had a 4-0 lead before he took the mound.

Boston got a run back in the third when Dave Henderson singled, Boggs walked and Barrett hit an RBI single. But that was the only noise the Red Sox would make all night. The Mets put it away in the seventh. With one out, Santana and Dykstra singled and with two outs, Hernandez drew a walk and Carter knocked in two runs with a base. They added another run in the eighth. The game ended 7-1 with Ojeda giving up five hits in seven innings of work.

With the Mets still facing a desperate situation, they went back to Darling for Game 4. The Red Sox should have considered the same tactic and returned to Hurst—both he and Clemens had worked on short rest in the ALCS and this was a customary short series approach at the time. Boston's fourth starter, Al Nipper, was easily the biggest liability in the rotation.

The Red Sox threatened early, loading the bases with two outs in the first and Gedman starting the second with a double. Darling escaped both times and in the fourth, the Mets got after Nipper.

Backman led off with a single and Carter homered over the Green Monster. Strawberry doubled down the left field line and scored on a single from Knight.

Darling was continuing to pitch well and made the 3-0 lead stand up. The Mets threatened to add to the lead in the sixth when Carter doubled and reached third with one out. But he was thrown out at the plate by Rice attempting to score on a fly ball. Nipper, to his credit, at least gave his team a chance.

But the Mets broke it open against Crawford. In the seventh, Mookie Wilson singled with one out and Dykstra homered with two outs. Carter again homered over the Green Monster in the eighth. The lead was 6-0 and even though Darling left after seven innings and the Red Sox scored twice in the eighth, they never got the tying run to the plate in the 6-2 final.



Through four games we already seen two big twists, with the underdog Red Sox grabbing the early lead and the Mets then showing their resilience in front of the Fenway crowd. Hurst and Gooden were on the mound for a crucial Game 5.

Not only had the road teams won all four games, but the home teams had never even led. That changed in the bottom of the second with Henderson tripled into the Fenway Triangle in right center and scored on a sac fly from Owen. Boston got another run in the third. An error by Santana and a walk opened the door and Evans hit a two-out RBI single to make it 2-0.

Hurst was again in complete command and not until the fifth did New York threaten, putting runners on second and third with one out. He struck out Dykstra and got out of the inning.

The Red Sox then added some insurance in the bottom of the inning.

Another triple to the Triangle, this one from Rice, got it rolling. Baylor was only able to start in the Fenway games when the DH was in effect. He singled in the run and Evans followed with another single. Gooden was lifted and Sid Fernandez came on. Henderson doubled to left for another run and it was 4-0.

The last two innings got a little bit interesting. Red Sox fans serenaded Strawberry with “Dar-ryl, Darryl!” taunting chants, and drawing an equally mocking doff of the cap from Strawberry. And on the field, the Mets made a bit of a move. Teufel homered in the eighth, the first time the Mets had scored off Hurst in seventeen innings. In the ninth, with two outs, Wilson doubled and Santana singled to make it 4-2 and bring the tying run to the plate. Hurst again struck out Dykstra to close the win.

Boston was one win from their first championship since 1918 and the fans were feeling it. This World Series was shaping up as one in which the overall series was competitive, but the individual games were at least modestly one-sided. All that was about to change as they headed back to New York for the weekend.

The Red Sox gave the ball to Clemens and the Mets countered with Ojeda. Boggs started the game by beating out an infield hit and with two outs scored on a double by Evans. In the bottom of the second, Owen singled with one out. Boston again finished the rally with two outs, with a single to right by Boggs moving Owen to third and a base hit from Barrett bringing him home.

Clemens cruised through four with the 2-0 lead before New York made a counterattack. Strawberry started it with a single and stole second. Knight singled to center to cut the lead in half. Wilson singled and moved Knight to third. There was still none out and the infield was playing for the double play. Clemens got it, with Heep grounding into a 4-6-3 twin-killing that brought the tying run in through the backdoor.

The Mets again threatened in the sixth, with runners on first and third, one out and Carter and Strawberry due up. Clemens K'd them both and one inning later the Red Sox got the lead.

Ojeda was removed for Roger McDowell, the best right handed option out of the New York bullpen. Barrett walked and then took second on a ground ball out from Buckner. Rice grounded to third, but a throwing error by Knight set up a second and third situation. Gedman came to the plate and singled to left, but in a play that would loom large, Rice was thrown out at home by Mookie Wilson. Boston had a 3-2 lead, but it could have been more.

Prior to the eighth, Clemens was removed and there were debates about whether he asked out or McNamara made the decision on his own. Given how well Clemens was pitching, and his competitive nature, it seems unlikely the pitcher would have asked out on his own. Schiraldi was summoned.

Lee Mazzilli came up as a pinch-hitter, batting in the pitcher's spot, and singled to right. Dykstra laid down a bunt that wasn't handled and everyone was safe. Backman bunted again and there were runners on second and third. Hernandez was intentionally walked to set up the force at

home, but Carter did his job and lifted a sac fly that tied the game. Strawberry had the chance to give his team the lead, but flew out to center.

The Mets got in position to win the game in the ninth, with a walk and yet another muffed bunt putting two aboard with none out. This time, Schiraldi punched out Howard Johnson, then got Mazzilli and Dykstra to send the game to extra innings.

Rick Aguilera, a combination fifth starter/long reliever, had come on for the ninth. In the tenth, Henderson greeted him with a leadoff home run. After hitting the home run that saved the Red Sox in the ALCS, Henderson was in position to become a New England hero. That outcome seemed even more likely after, with two outs, Boggs doubled and Barrett singled him in.

Schiraldi was still on to hold the 5-3 lead. He got Backman and Hernandez to fly out. Carter came up and kept the game alive with a single to left. Moments earlier, Kevin Mitchell had been in the clubhouse making arrangements for his flight into the offseason, so certain was he that the game was over. He had to rush back into his pants when summoned to pinch-hit. He singled. Knight singled.

The score was now 5-4, runners were on first and third and Mookie Wilson was at the plate. Bob Stanley was called into the game. Earlier in the year, Stanley had been booed by the fans. His response was that they would love him in October when he got the last out of the World Series.

With that opportunity in front of him, Stanley and Gedman couldn't get on the same page and an inside pitch skipped past the catcher and tied the game, with Knight moving up to second. It was then that Wilson hit the ground ball we've all seen countless times, the one that skipped through the legs of Buckner and gave the Mets a stunning 6-5 win.

Buckner has to be defended on three different counts—the game was already tied when he made the error. It was also a deep ground ball and with bad heels, Buckner did not run well and there's a good chance Wilson beats the ball out. Knight would have to stay on third and keep the game going, but it's far from a guarantee this even ends the inning. And there was still a Game 7 to play.

It was a Game 7 that was delayed by rain, and McNamara used the extra day to get Hurst on the mound. Hurst had already been voted Series MVP once, when the preparations were being made for the Boston celebration. He could really seal the deal by winning his third game on Monday night.

Darling was making his own third start, as the Series would end with the same pitching matchup that it began. It wouldn't be quite the pitcher's duel this time around.

Any thought of the Red Sox just rolling over after the events of late Saturday night were dispelled in the second inning. Evans and Gedman hit back-to-back home runs to start the frame. Henderson walked and with one out Hurst bunted him out, and then Boggs knocked in the run with a single.

It was 3-0, although a fatalist Red Sox fan might recall that in 1975 Boston also led the seventh game 3-0 and that was against a 108-win team, Cincinnati's Big Red Machine. The Mets had won 108 games in 1986.

Hurst continued his extraordinary pitching through five innings, allowing just one hit and Darling also settled in. New York came back in the sixth.

Mazzilli and Wilson each singled with one out and Teufel worked a walk. Hernandez delivered a two-run single to center and with runners on the corners, a productive ground ball from Carter tied the game 3-3. Hurst would leave after the sixth, turning it over to Schiraldi, a circumstance that no one in Boston could possibly feel good about.

Knight greeted Schiraldi with a home run to start the seventh. Dykstra singled, moved up on a wild pitch and scored on a base hit by Santana. McDowell, now in the game for Darling, stayed in to bat for himself with the 5-3 lead and bunted up Santana. McNamara made a pitching change, going to the left handed Joe Sambito. After an intentional walk to Wilson and a real walk to Backman, Hernandez hit a sac fly to make it 6-3.

Now the Mets were in command, and the Red Sox were the ones that refused to go quietly. In the top of the eighth, Buckner and Rice singled and each scored on a double from Evans. There was nobody out, the score was 6-5 and the tying run was on second. Jesse Orosco, the left handed option out of the pen came on for McDowell. Gedman hit a line drive, but it resulted in an out. Henderson, out of miracles, struck out. Baylor grounded out.

The Mets were three outs away, but insurance wasn't going to hurt. Nipper was now in the game and Strawberry took his revenge for the Game 5 taunts, homering to right. Knight singled and eventually scored on a single from Orosco, who helped seal his own save.

The drama was finally over. At 8-5, Orosco took care of business in the ninth, striking out Barrett to end it.

Knight would be named Series MVP, going 9-for-23 for the series and the Game 7 home run that put his team ahead to stay. Carter was 8-for-29, had the two-homer game in the must-win Game 4 and finished with 9 RBI—no one else on the Mets had more than five. Kudos also to Darling, who pitched 17 2/3 innings in his three starts and only gave up four runs.

On the Red Sox side, Hurst would still have been a reasonable pick in defeat, going 2-0 and giving up just five runs in 23 innings pitched. Henderson went 10-for-25 and had what looked to be the Series-clinching home run in Game 6. Evans was 8-for-26 and also drove in nine runs—and like the Mets, no one else had more than five.

Given all that, I find the Knight selection to be shaky. If I had a 1-2-3 ballot, it would go Carter-Hurst-Knight.

One thing we can say for certain—the 1986 World Series had plenty of heroes. It's time to focus there rather than the unfair goat horns that have hung on one man.



## 1987

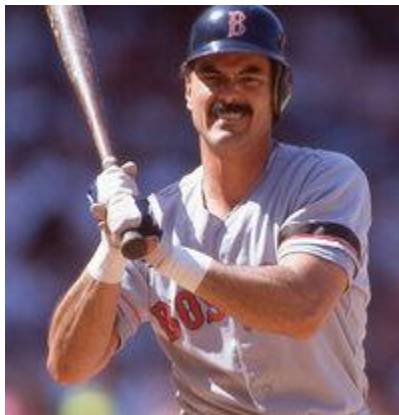
The Boston Red Sox endured their fair share of heartbreaking finishes through an 86-year championship drought. One thing they often did was make credible bounceback efforts. The one-game playoff loss to the Yankees of 1978 was followed up by 91 wins in 1979. The 2003 devastation at the hands of the Yanks was followed by the historic title run of 2004. The most famous of Boston's baseball losses was 1986. But 1987 would be different. There was no redemption--not even a feisty effort to come off the mat. The 1987 Boston Red Sox were a train wreck from Day One.

It started in spring training. McNamara told the players to put last year behind them—as though making it to Game 7 of the World Series constituted an epic fail. The tone was set.

Gedman had a contract dispute and did not report to camp. He wasn't signed until the start of May. Marc Sullivan and John Marzano were inadequate as replacements and Gedman had a poor year after he returned to the fold.

Jim Rice was now 34-years-old and while the future Hall of Famer's on-base percentage was a respectable .357, his power dipped and he only hit 13 home runs. Don Baylor, the veteran DH, saw his power numbers slip and only slugged .404. Dave Henderson saw his batting average plummet to .234.

The Red Sox could still score runs. Wade Boggs batted .363 and won the third of what would be four consecutive batting titles. Boggs also hit 24 home runs, easily his career high. Marty Barrett posted a solid .357 on-base percentage. And some young outfielders started to make their mark. Ellis Burks, Todd Benzinger and Mike Greenwell were all productive hitters.



The success of the young outfielders moved Dwight Evans to first base, but the 35-year-old kept putting up numbers offensively. In fact, he posted an on-base percentage of .417, slugged .569, hit 34 home runs and drove in 123 runs. Those are MVP-caliber numbers. Evans finished fourth in the voting in spite of his team's poor play.

There were enough success stories that Boston ranked fourth in the American League in runs scored. And Roger Clemens, fresh off his breakout year of '86 when won both the Cy Young and MVP awards, went on to win another Cy Young Award in '87.

But if Clemens wasn't on the mound, the pitching in Fenway Park was a disaster. Bruce Hurst won 15 games, but the ERA of the #2 starter jumped to 4.41. Every one else who got a shot in the rotation had an ERA over 5. The bullpen was no better and the Red Sox staff ended up ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in the AL in ERA.

The season started in Milwaukee. The Brewers used the Red Sox to get off to a blazing start. Boston lost all three games in old County Stadium. The Red Sox went on to play reasonably well against contending Toronto, winning four of seven April matchups with the Blue Jays. But a road trip from April 24 to May 3 would be devastating.

The trip started in Texas with a ten-inning loss on a Friday night. There was another extra-inning loss to the Rangers on Sunday. By the time the trip was over, Boston had lost eight of ten and was looking at a 10 ½ game hole in the AL East.

The Red Sox hit the Memorial Day turn at 17-25, still 10 ½ out. They weren't out of it—Detroit, who would ultimately win the AL East, was 20-21 and seven games back. But the Tigers had something the Red Sox didn't and that was pitching. It showed in June when Boston lost six of seven to Detroit. Those games established who was going to bounce back and contend and who was dead. The Red Sox were dead.

There were still some nice moments. The Yankees had moved into first place by June and Boston took two of three in a weekend set at Fenway. Clemens won the Sunday rubber match with a complete-game win. The Red Sox also swept the Brewers. But Boston never could get the deficit into single digits and a West Coast trip just prior to the All-Star break resulted in a 3-8 record and 13 ½ game hole in the division.

At 41-47, the Red Sox were not going to get back into the race, especially not with the Tigers and Blue Jays on their way to the two best records in baseball, the Brewers en route to 90-plus wins and the Yankees in contention and actually leading the pack at the All-Star break. The balance of the season was about saying goodbye to players and enjoying some signature moments.

Bill Buckner was released on July 23. Baylor and Henderson were traded at the end of August, each landing with eventual division winners in Minnesota and San Francisco respectively.

In the meantime, the Red Sox swept an August series from the eventual World Series champion Twins. Boston delivered their rivals from the Bronx a big blow right after Labor Day when the Red Sox won two of three. Clemens again won the rubber match and the fading Yanks were pushed 6 ½ games off the pace.

This doesn't mean there was a September surge—the Red Sox went 2-8 in games against the Tigers and Brewers. And Boston finished sub-.500 at 78-84. The last high point came on the final day of the season when Clemens threw a two-hit shutout at Milwaukee for his 20<sup>th</sup> win, a milestone that may well have secured him the Cy Young Award. Clemens received 21 of 28 first-place votes in winning the award.

But personal milestones and isolated nice moments were all the 1987 Boston Red Sox could offer the faithful after the heartbreak of October 1986. The good news is that better days were around the corner.

**1988**

The pressure was on in 1988. McNamara's job was on the line and everyone in baseball knew it when the 1988 season began. The urgency of the moment was underscored when the team acquired Chicago Cubs' closer Lee Smith to shore up the bullpen before the season began.

Boston could score runs. They had the top offense in the American League in 1988 and it wasn't via the usual 1980s Red Sox route of hitting the ball over the Green Monster. Boston only ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the American League in home runs. But they were atop the AL in batting average, walks and doubles. And no one personified that better than Boggs. The 30-year-old third baseman hit .366 to win his fifth batting title in six years. His on-base percentage soared at .476 and the slugging percentage was a solid .390.

And Boggs wasn't even the most complete offensive player on the Red Sox in 1988. That honor belonged to 24-year-old left fielder Mike Greenwell. He hit .325, drove in 119 runs and finished second in the American League MVP voting.



Greenwell was one part of a terrific outfield. Centerfielder Ellis Burks was a rising star and the 23-year-old finished with a stat line of .367 on-base percentage/.481 slugging percentage and he drove in 92 runs. On the other end of the career spectrum was the 36-year-old Evans, who had 111 RBI and a stat line of .375/.487.

Jody Reed, the 25-year-old shortstop, added a .380 OBP to the mix. The rest of the lineup struggled with poor years from Gedman and from Todd Benzinger at first base. Barrett saw his production dip and Rice was on the downside of his career at age 35. Rice hit 15 home runs and drove in 72 runs.

If the offense was top-heavy, carried by a small number of excellent players, the pitching staff was even more so. Clemens was outstanding, winning 18 games with 2.93 ERA and pitching 264 innings. Hurst won 18 more, had an ERA of 3.66 and also cleared the 200-inning barrier. After that, it was anybody's guess.

Oil Can Boyd made 23 starts and finished with a disastrous 5.34 ERA. Mike Smithson was worse with a 5.97 ERA in his 18 starts. Wes Gardner did some yeoman's work shuffling between the rotation and the bullpen, posting a 3.50 ERA, but the bottom line was that anything after Clemens and Hurst was an adventure.

Smith did his part and solidified the closer's spot, saving 29 games—a good total in the days when complete games were more common (Clemens & Hurst alone combined for 21 complete games). Perhaps the biggest lift the Red Sox staff got was the good work of a couple veteran bullpen members. Bob Stanley and Dennis Lamp each produced ERAs under 3.50. And the Boston staff was able to finish with a composite 3.97 ERA—hitting the league average right on the nose.

Opening Day didn't go well—Smith gave up a 10<sup>th</sup>-inning home run to Detroit's Alan Trammell and the Red Sox lost. But they still started 14-6 and that included three wins in five games over

the Tigers, who were the defending AL East champs. It also included a 5-0 record against the Brewers, who would be in the hunt all season long.

From April 28 to May 31, the Red Sox played teams from the AL West and the season took a turn for the worse. They lost 17 of 30 games and dipped into fifth place, seven games off the pace set by the division-leading Yankees. When Boston resumed playing AL East teams they promptly lost four straight to Toronto in Fenway.

By the All-Star break, the Red Sox were 43-42 and nine games out. McNamara was fired and Joe Morgan replaced him—not the Hall of Fame second baseman, but the third-base coach who was a baseball lifer and had never managed above the minor-league level. To say the team responded well to the change would be a drastic understatement.

Clemens took the mound in the first game back from the break and faced Kansas City's Bret Saberhagen in an attractive pitcher's duel to open a Friday doubleheader. Evans hit an early two-run homer, Clemens went the distance and the Red Sox won 3-1. And the next thing you knew, Boston was off and rolling.

They swept that doubleheader, won Saturday's game in walkoff fashion and took the first twelve games Morgan managed. After a loss, the Red Sox promptly resumed winning, taking seven straight. Throughout Red Sox Nation they called it "Morgan Magic." They made the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. Even more important, they got some pitching help.

Baltimore was having a miserable season and looking to trade Mike Boddicker, a hero of their 1983 World Series championship team. Boston won the bidding war—it wasn't exactly cheap—the price was a couple minor leaguers by the names of Curt Schilling and Brady Anderson. But in the days when the only way to the postseason were to finish first in a seven-team division and advance directly to the LCS, a deal like this was worth it...so long as your veteran pitcher delivered.

The deal went down on July 29. The next day, Clemens won another high-profile pitchers' duel, beating Milwaukee's Teddy Higuera 3-2, with the help of a walkoff single by Barrett. On July 30, Boddicker made his first start for the Red Sox. He threw a shutout. By the time Labor Day arrived, Boston was in first place.

It was still a close four-team race. The Tigers were nipping at the heels of the Red Sox, a game back. The Yankees and Brewers were each four out, with the Blue Jays further in the rearview mirror at 6 ½ in the hole. Boston took advantage of playing the Orioles and Indians—the only two sub-.500 teams in the AL East—in the first week after the holiday weekend and they nudged out to a 3 ½ game lead.

Clemens took the ball for the opener of a four-game home series with New York in mid-September. When he lost, the potential for another Boston fade was there. Instead, the offense rallied with 19 runs in the next three games. Hurst threw a complete-game three-hitter and the Red Sox won the next three. The Yankees were all but finished and with the AL East lead stretched to six games, Boston was firmly in command.

They made it modestly interesting, losing six of nine and seeing the lead shrink to 2 ½ games with four days left in the season. Milwaukee, New York and Detroit were still in play. Boddicker took the ball in Cleveland and threw another shutout. Burks drove in four runs and the easy 12-0 win eliminated the Tigers and assured the Red Sox of at least a one-game playoff with either the Brewers or Yankees. The magic number was one.

The clinching moment wasn't exactly inspiring. Clemens gave up three runs in the first and lost 4-2 to the Indians on Friday night. But while that was going on, Detroit ace Jack Morris was knocking out the Yankees. Those in New England that stayed up for the West Coast games were able to celebrate when Milwaukee lost to Oakland. The AL East flag was returning to Boston.

## **1988 ALCS**

The Oakland Athletics and Boston Red Sox had considerably different resumes when they came into the 1988 ALCS. The A's had dethroned the defending World Series champion Minnesota Twins 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. Dave Stewart, a 21-game winner, got the start for the A's, while the Red Sox went to Hurst.

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

Lefthander Rick Honeycutt was summoned to face 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. Carney Lansford led off the top of the eighth with a double down the left field line and Dave Henderson, now with the A's, promptly slapped a single the other way to right. A's closer Dennis 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 Storm 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. Evans and Greenwell each walked, and then Rice's line drive to centerfield was muffed by 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 A's starter Bob 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 came through again, with a solo home run.

With a 5-0 lead and Mike Boddicker on the mound, it would have seemed Boston was ready to get back in the series. But Oakland wiped 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 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 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 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.

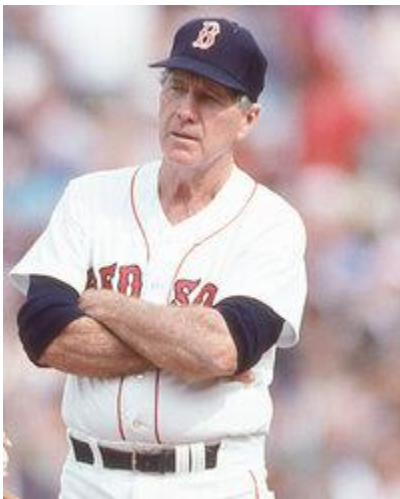
## 1989

The 1989 Boston Red Sox kept the franchise on an up-and-down pendulum. Following the division title run of '88, the '89 Red Sox struggled to an 83-79 record, with only a weak division keeping them in contention much of the year.

Boston's pitching was in trouble, as Hurst bolted via free agency. The Sox still had Clemens, a 17-game winner in 1989, at the top of the rotation. Boddicker was a decent #2, at 15-11 and a 4.00 ERA, and John Doherty turned in a respectable year, winning 12 games with a 3.99 ERA. But the depth was lacking. The fourth and fifth spots in the rotation were complete messes, and the bullpen lacked a reliable bridge to get to closer Lee Smith.

The everyday lineup benefitted from an offseason trade that sent Todd Benzinger to the Cincinnati Reds in exchange for Nick Esasky. Benzinger was a pretty good player and would continue to be so with the Reds, but Esasky had a big season in 1989. A power right handed bat, tailor-made for Fenway Park, Esasky hit 30 home runs, had 108 RBIs and was steadily aboard with a .355 on-base percentage.

Four other players had strong years. Boggs continued to churn out hits and the third baseman ended up with a .430 OBP. Greenwell was solid, if unspectacular in left, with a .370 OBP/.443 slugging percentage. Burks was on .365/.471. And Dwight Evans, now 37-years-old, was still getting it done in right, a .397 OBP, 20 home runs and 100 RBIs.



The problems were mixed in though and they came from name players. Gedman played just 93 games at catcher and hit .212. Rice didn't age as well as Evans and played only 56 games and hit just three home runs. Barrett's production was woeful at second base. The offense needed to score a lot to cover for its problematic pitching, and this many holes weren't going to cut it.

Boston was 19-21 on Memorial Day, but the AL East was so putrid that at least as of May 21, the Red Sox were actually in first place with a sub-.500 record.

Towards the end of May, the Red Sox swept the Seattle Mariners and at 22-21, they were now virtually soaring in the AL East, up a half-game. But the Sox quickly gave it all back.

They lost six of eight, including being swept by the Toronto Blue Jays. The surprising Baltimore Orioles, who just one year earlier set a new standard of incompetence with 18 straight losses to open the year, started to play well and the Red Sox fell in a 5 ½ game hole.

Even being five and a half back, Boston wasn't in bad shape. No one expected the Orioles or the second-place Cleveland Indians, who hadn't produced a real contender in decades, to keep up the pace. And the Red Sox were playing the best of the teams considered likely to step into the vacuum.

Boston finally made .500 on the first game after the All-Star break, with Clemens out dueling Minnesota Twins' ace Frank Viola in the Metrodome, 3-1. But the Red Sox again lost ground as quickly as they gained it. They ended up splitting four in the Twin Cities, lost a series in Texas, another at home to the Chicago White Sox and dug a hole as deep as nine games.



Boston chipped the margin back down to four games, when the Orioles came to Fenway for a big four-game set that would begin on July 31.

Boston came out attacking in Monday's opener, scoring six times in the second inning. Eric Hetzel, one of the pitchers who got several chances at stabilizing the back end of the rotation, gave much of it back, but the Sox got 3.2 innings of crucial relief work from veteran Bob Stanley, and they took the opener 9-6.

Tuesday was a doubleheader, and Boston took the opener when Burks broke a 3-3 tie in the seventh with an RBI double. Then the Sox took the nightcap—Esasky ripped a three-run shot in the fourth and otherwise inconsistent Wes Gardner had a strong outing on the mound in a 6-2 win.

In the Wednesday finale, the Sox took a 6-0 lead and the Fenway Faithful could smell a first-place tie. But Hetzel, back on the mound after his short stint on Monday was again hit around and this time Stanley's relief efforts suffered the same fate in a 9-8 loss. The series was clearly a success and the margin in the AL East was only two games. But the Red Sox had given away an opportunity for more.

A four-game series in Baltimore resulted in a split, and the whole division continued to muddle along. But Toronto was starting to come on strong. When the Blue Jays arrived in Fenway on August 14 for a three-game series, both teams were 2 ½ games out. And this mid-August series proved to be the death knell of the season.

Boston scored twice early on in the Monday opener, but got only two singles over the last six innings in a 4-2 loss. Toronto ace Dave Stieb kept the bats under control in a 7-2 rout on Tuesday. Clemens got the ball in Wednesday's finale, and handed over a 3-2 lead to the bullpen. Rob Murphy came on and blew the save, losing the game 7-3.

The Sox and Jays had decisively shifted places. Toronto would eventually chase down Baltimore and win the division on the final weekend. Boston fell hard. They briefly nudged within four games of the lead at the end of August, but a West Coast trip in early September produced a 1-8 record and ended the chase.

Boston's record was as low as 70-76 on September 13, when they found a closing push. A 13-3 run, including taking a series in Toronto that briefly quelled the Jays' pennant push, helped the Red Sox finish with a winning record. They ended up six games out of first.

Perhaps the season could have been worse, given the general lack of depth. But given the weakness of the AL East, 1989 has the look of one big lost opportunity for the Red Sox.

## 1990

The 1990 Boston Red Sox continued a pattern of even-year magic and Roger Clemens was the biggest reason why. The Rocket's 1.93 ERA was easily the American League's best. He won 21 games and finished second in the Cy Young voting. Clemens might have won the award and

arguably should have, given his ERA. But the 27-win season posted by Bob Welch in Oakland was too much to ignore.

The rest of the team was well-balanced. There were no obvious stars—Boggs was still a solid player and finished with a .386 on-base percentage, although for this season, Burks was the better all-around player—.349 OBP, .486 slugging percentage, 21 home runs and a Gold Glove. Reed finished with a .371 OBP at second base.

Greenwell wasn't at his 1988 runner-up MVP level, but the left fielder was still a productive offensive threat. Dwight Evans had lost his power and was relegated to the DH role, but could still get on base. On the other end of the age spectrum, Carlos Quintana finished with a .354 OBP at the age of 24.

The big free-agent acquisition was closer Jeff Reardon away from Minnesota. Reardon was good, but of perhaps more significance is that he made Lee Smith expendable. The Red Sox traded their incumbent closer to St. Louis in exchange for rightfielder Tom Brunansky. The move strengthened the outfield and Brunansky would play his best baseball at this season's biggest moments.

Boston muddled along to start the season, with a .500 record on Memorial Day. Fortunately, so did the rest of the AL East and the entire division was within five games. The Red Sox picked up the pace in June, sweeping the Blue Jays four straight in Fenway and leading the race by as many as 4 ½ games. Boston slumped going into the All-Star break, but they were still a half-game up on Toronto and those two teams had separated themselves from the field.

Starting on July 30, the Red Sox swept a good Chicago White Sox team in Fenway. Later in August, Boston ripped off a 12-2 stretch against divisional rivals including taking three of four in Toronto. By Labor Day, Boston had a 6 ½ game lead and the race looked close to over. But in pre-2004 New England, no one could ever breathe easy. This year was no exception.

The Red Sox lost three straight to the powerful Oakland A's and four straight in Chicago. The Blue Jays surged, on the strength of three straight walk off wins. By mid-September, the race was a dead heat. Boston and Toronto were tied for first with six games to play when they met for a weekend set at Fenway.

Boston took a dramatic opener—the bullpen in front of Reardon was the team's biggest weakness and reliever Jeff Gray gave up a two-run homer in the eighth to put the Sox in a 6-5 hole. They answered in the ninth, with little-used bench player Jeff Stone lining a base hit into the gap in right center to win it.

Brunansky and Clemens took over on Saturday. The former hit three home runs. The latter threw six shutout innings. The bullpen let it get interesting, but the Red Sox won 7-5. They dropped the finale, but had control with three games left.

The margin was still one game when Boston hosted Chicago in the Wednesday night finale. Brunansky ripped an RBI triple to key a three-run second inning. Boddicker pitched well and

handed a 3-1 lead to the bullpen. Reardon came on to try and clinch, but runners reached first and second with two outs.

Ozzie Guillen was the batter for Chicago and hit a line drive headed toward the right field corner that looked destined to score both runs. Instead, Brunansky made one of the great defensive plays in the long history of Fenway, a sliding catch that saved the game and clinched the AL East. Tom Brunansky and the 1990 Boston Red Sox had carved out a small little place in franchise history.

## 1990 ALCS

.For the second time in three years, the Oakland A's met the 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. The A's sent Dave Stewart to face Clemens. Both were 20-game winners.

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 Mark McGwire. A one-out single by Jamie Quirk put runners on the corners and a sac fly from AL MVP Rickey Henderson tied the game.



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. This time it was 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 EBurks singled with one out. Oakland manager Tony LaRussa played matchups—he used lefty reliever Rick Honeycutt to get Greenwell. Then the manager went to closer Dennis Eckersley to strike out 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 Mike Moore to the mound to face the 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. Terry 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, 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 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 Boggs to ground into a double play. Another ground ball out from Greenwell ended the series. Oakland had its third consecutive American League pennant. The Red Sox had now lost 10 straight postseason games dating back to the '86 World Series.

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.

## 1991

The 1991 Boston Red Sox were the last team for Joe Morgan. They made a run at cooking up some more “Morgan Magic” before fading at the end and ushering in the end of the era that had begun under John McNamara back in 1985.

Change was already in the air at Fenway Park. Prior to the season, the Red Sox cut ties with Dwight Evans, Marty Barrett and Mike Boddicker. Boston signed Jack Clark on the free agent market and the DH hit 28 home runs, but the offense was not up to usual Red Sox standards, finishing seventh in the American League in runs scored.

It's not that there weren't some good hitters in the Boston lineup. There was still Boggs at third base, who churned out a .421 on-base percentage. Carlos Quintana had a .375 OBP at first base, while Greenwell and Reed kept themselves on base consistently. But the lack of power from anyone other than Clark prevented the whole from being as good as the sum of the parts.

And the pitching certainly wasn't going to cover for anything. The rotation came around to Clemens every fifth day and the Rocket covered for a lot of ills, winning 18 games with a 2.62 ERA and logging 271 innings. But everything behind him—from Mike Gardiner to Tom Bolton to Matt Young to Kevin Morton to Danny Darwin—was a train wreck.

Morgan was able to get good work from Greg Harris, who both started and relieved and finished with a 3.85 ERA, and Reardon saved 40 games. But finding pitching on the days of a non-Clemens start was always a roll of the dice.

Boston still got off to a nice start, with an early 7-1 stretch that included a three-game sweep of the Milwaukee Brewers, who would finish over .500 in the old AL East. By Memorial Day, the Red Sox were 24-17, and led the division by a half-game over the Toronto Blue Jays, with the Detroit Tigers and Brewers not far in the rearview mirror.

It was a stretch just before and immediately after Memorial Day that the Sox started to unravel. They went 3-8 against divisional rivals, then dropped three straight on the West Coast to the California Angels before recovering. Just prior to the All-Star break they made another run

through AL East teams, and again struggled, this time going 6-7. Boston stumbled into the midway point at 42-38 and trailing Toronto by 5 ½ games.

A 2-10 sequence out of the All-Star break seemed to spell the death knell for the season, as the Red Sox were run over by the Minnesota Twins, Texas Rangers and Chicago White Sox, who were the top three teams in the old AL West. Boston fell into an 11 ½ game hole on August 7. It was over.

Only you couldn't tell that to a friend of mine. We were in college and my friend was a hard-core Red Sox fan. During a hang-out session at which too much beer was consumed, he insisted the Red Sox were going to win the AL East and bet me a bottle of Crown Royal straight-up that they would do it. I gladly jumped all over the bet.

Call it coincidence, but that was the point the Red Sox began to make one final push for their beloved manager. They went to Toronto for a four-game series that, by rights, should have been the formal burial of the season. Instead it was where a revival meeting was called.

Quintana hit two home runs in Friday night's opener, four other players had three hits and the Red Sox won 12-7. Harris came out on Saturday and threw a four-hitter, while Clark and Tony Pena drove in three runs apiece to win 7-1. Greenwell delivered a four-hit game on Sunday, with Quintana and Burks getting three hits apiece in a 9-6 win.

Clemens pitched Monday's wraparound finale and struggled, but Clark, Greenwell and Burks had his back. Batting in the 4-5-6 spots in the order, the trio combined to go 9/15 with ten RBIs and lead an 11-8 win. The Red Sox were still 7 ½ games out, but they were breathing.

And they didn't slow down. They won eight out of ten and cut the lead to 3 ½ games by August 22. Momentum briefly slowed, but the Red Sox regained steam and were back within three after taking a series from the then-lowly New York Yankees in the Bronx.

With three weeks to go in the season, the Red Sox met another struggling AL East foe in the Baltimore Orioles, took the series and cut the lead to a game and a half. I was now looking to find the budget funds for that bottle of Crown Royal it seemed like I might owe.

On the season's penultimate weekend, the Red Sox went to Milwaukee. It was here that the dream died. Morton pitched on Friday and gave up six runs in the sixth inning of a 7-5 loss. Brewer starter Jamie Navarro—a decent pitcher, but nothing special—threw a four-hitter at the Sox on Saturday. Boston led on Sunday 4-3 in the eighth, but Reardon blew a save and they lost 5-4.

Even though the Sox salvaged the Monday finale, there were now 3 ½ out with a week to go and it was all but over. As if to underscore the point, Boston mailed it in and lost five of their last six, finishing 84-78.

Morgan was let go when the season was over, as the organization turned to Butch Hobson, a decision that worked almost as poorly as the one to go from Terry Francona to Bobby Valentine two decades later. It would be four years before the Red Sox became a contender again.

And that bottle of Crown Royal? Well, my friend never paid up. Two years later, I quit drinking and five years later I became a Red Sox fan. Can't accept it now.