

## THE OAKLAND A'S DYNASTY



## 1970-75

### INTRODUCTION

Moving west was proving to be a good thing for the A's franchise. The years they spent in Kansas City from 1955-67 had been about as fruitless as any 13-year stretch in baseball history. The A's hadn't even played good baseball since they were still in Philadelphia and the legendary Connie Mack was still their manager back in 1949. And they hadn't been to the World Series since a 1929-31 stretch when they won three consecutive pennants and two championships.

But upon arrival in Oakland in 1968, the A's immediately jumped to the right side of .500. They made further improvement in 1969, winning 88 games. As the 1970s dawned, it was apparent that the A's were becoming a contender. What was not apparent is that this group would not only contend, they would become the decade's defining dynasty.

They were a colorful team and became known as “The Mustache Gang”, for the shunning of baseball’s clean-shaven conventions. They had fabulous pitching, with names like Catfish Hunter, Vida Blue and Ken Holtzman leading the rotation. They had one of the game’s greatest relievers in Rollie Fingers, whose handle-bar mustache became legendary unto itself.

The everyday lineup had key players that included Sal Bando, Bert Campaneris and Joe Rudi. And they had an outfielder who eventually became a love-hate flashpoint for baseball fans across the country in Reggie Jackson.

The names of these stars live on in baseball lore—some, like Reggie, Catfish and Rollie, were well-known enough to be recognized by first name only. In this compilation, we watch their continued emergence in 1970 and their first postseason trip in 1971. Then we see the historic greatness—the three straight World Series titles. Finally, one last trip to the playoffs in 1975 brings the compilation to an end.

Each of these articles—a narrative of the regular season, and game-by-game review of each postseason series—is published on TheSportsNotebook.com. This compilation brings them together, with obvious redundancies edited out, to create a cohesive narrative of the A’s Dynasty.

As a reminder to younger readers, baseball had a very different landscape in the era we’re about to review. Most notably:

\*There were only divisions per league, an East and a West. Thus, Oakland’s AL West rivals included Kansas City, Minnesota and Chicago, in addition to the California Angels and Texas Rangers. The Seattle Mariners didn’t exist until shortly after this era ended.

\*Only the division winner qualified for postseason play, going directly into the League Championship Series. The regular season was played with an urgency not always seen today.

\*The designated hitter did not exist when the 1970s began. It was only adopted for use by the American League in 1973.

With that, let’s get started on our six-year journey through the Oakland A’s Dynasty.

## 1970

The 1970 Oakland A's continued the gradual improvement and set the stage for a glorious run.

There was a lot of young talent starting to emerge. Catfish was 24-years-old and the future Hall of Fame pitcher made 40 starts and won 18 games with a respectable 3.81 ERA. Rollie was 23, split time between the rotation and the pen and posted a 3.65 ERA.

udi was another 23-year-old and still just a fourth outfielder for now. But he still got nearly 400 plate appearances and finished with a stat line of .341 on-base percentage/.480 slugging percentage. Rick Monday was 24-years-old in centerfield and his stat line popped at .387/.451

Campaneris at short and Bando at third base were into their primes in their late twenties on the left side of the infield. Bando hit 20 homers and had a .407 OBP. Campaneris hit 22 home runs and also stole 42 bases.

Reggie was 24-years-old. His stat line ended up .359/.458. Jackson hit 23 home runs and stole 26 bases.

The young core that would eventually make this team a dynasty weren't alone. Oakland swung a big trade with the Milwaukee Brewers to get first baseman Don Mincher. The price was high—Ken Sanders would become the American League's top reliever for a few seasons (the Brewers were an AL team prior to 1998). But Mincher hit 27 home runs for the A's.

On the pitching side, Chuck Dobson was another 40-start workhorse with 3.74 ERA. Blue Moon Odom was a respectable third starter, with a 3.80 ERA. Diego Segui joined Fingers as the versatile arms who could start and relieve, winning ten games and finishing with a 2.56 ERA.

One of the veterans, Mudcat Grant was the best pitcher of them all in 1970. Grant saved 24 games—a high number when complete games were still expected of starters—and finished with a dazzling 1.82 ERA. Paul Lindblad, Marcel Lachemann and Bob Lockner all provided quality relief work with sub-3.00 ERAs. And the 20-year-old Blue started to get some work, posting a 2.09 ERA in his six starts.

It added up to a balanced team, one that would finish fourth in the 12-team American League for staff ERA and fifth in runs scored.

Oakland mostly pattered through the season's early movement. On the plus side, they won five of six against the lowly Washington Senators (to become the Texas Rangers in 1972). They won four straight over the Chicago White Sox. On the down side, they lost four straight in Boston. And they lost three of four in Minnesota.

The series with the Twins was particularly notable, because Minnesota was the team to beat in the AL West. Minnesota won the inaugural AL West title in 1969. And as this 1970 season reached Memorial Day, the Twins were again setting the division's pace. They were a ½ game up on the California Angels. The A's were in third place, six games back, with a record of 22-20.

No one was better in 1970 than the Baltimore Orioles, running away with the AL East and ultimately the World Series title. Oakland hosted Baltimore for a three-game series at the start of June. The Tuesday night opener was nothing notable, as the A's bats mustered only five hits off against Jim Palmer and lost 5-1. The offense continued to be quiet for seven innings on Wednesday night. But Fingers was pitching well and it was a 1-1 tie going into the eighth.

Oakland leftfielder Felipe Alou singled. So did Rudi. Bando homered to dead center. The A's won it 4-1. Thursday night's finale followed a similar script. Catfish was pitching well, but trailed 1-0 in the sixth. Rudi got a rally started by beating out a bunt. Bando bunted him up to second and Mincher tied the game with an RBI single. Then light-hitting catcher Frank Fernandez ripped a two-blast to get the lead. Bando homered later in the game. The game ended 4-2 and the A's had a nice series win.

A week and a half later, Oakland made the return trip to Baltimore's old Memorial Stadium for a weekend set. Friday night's opener went to extra innings tied 2-2. A hit batsman got the A's going in the 11<sup>th</sup>. Campaneris and Reggie hit consecutive RBI doubles and secured the 4-2 win.

Both Campy and Reggie kept hitting on Saturday night. The former had three hits in the leadoff spot. The latter had three hits of his own, including a home run. And it was a good thing, because this one turned into a slugfest. Oakland second baseman Dick Green delivered the biggest blow of all, a three-run blast that made the difference in a 10-7 win.

By Sunday, the A's and Orioles were back to playing tight pitcher's duels and going extra innings. After Mudcat got lifted for a pinch-hitter (the DH did not exist in the American League until 1973), Baltimore capitalized and took the finale 4-2 in ten. But over a key stretch of the early summer, the A's had beaten the best team in baseball four times in six tries.

It was the highlight of a strong run into the All-Star break. Oakland's record was up to 45-35 by the midpoint. That was enough to narrow the gap on California. But Minnesota had answered with strong play of their own. The A's were still in third place, and still 6 ½ games back.

There was still plenty of time to make a move, but Oakland stumbled out of the break. They lost three straight at home to Minnesota. They lost three straight in New York. They lost two of three at home to Baltimore. The A's showed resilience—they beat the Yankees three straight at home, swept the Orioles on the road and stayed alive by winning three of five games in Minnesota.

It was enough to hold serve, to still be 76-62 at the Labor Day turn and still within six games of the lead. But all the games against the Twins in the late summer were an opportunity to really slash into that gap. That opportunity was missed and there weren't many more left.

The last really good opportunity came on September 9-10 in the Twin Cities, with three games over two days. The A's were outscored 16-4 and lost all three. That was the death knell for any pennant hopes.

Oakland did not throw in the towel then last couple weeks. They won two of three in California in the season's final week, and pushed past the Angels for second place. The A's had 88 wins going into the season finale at home against Milwaukee. With a chance to improve on 1969's record, they rallied by beating their old friend Ken Sanders. Down 4-1, the A's got Sanders for two in the eighth and two in the ninth for a 5-4 win. They ended the season at 89-73.

That record was fourth-best in the American League overall and sixth-best in all of baseball. The playoff standards of today could never have been imagined in 1970, but these A's were indeed postseason caliber by the more lenient standards of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It wouldn't be long before Oakland would be playoff-caliber by the rules of their own day.

## 1971

The 1971 Oakland A's were ready to take the next step. The lineup was keyed by Bando. With a stat line of .377 on-base percentage/.452 slugging percentage and 24 homers, the third baseman finished second in the American League MVP voting.

Reggie hit 32 homers, stole 16 bases and posted a sparkling stat line of .352/.508. Monday popped 18 homers and held down the centerfield spot. Campaneris played good defense at short and also swiped 34 bags.

Manager Dick Williams had a deep bench, one that got production from Tommy Davis and Gene Tenace. Rudi didn't have good numbers, but—like the team as a whole—Rudi had some great days in his immediate future. Dave Duncan, one day to gain fame as Tony LaRussa's pitching coach, was behind the plate and Duncan hit 15 home runs.

It was all enough for Oakland to finish third in the American League in runs scored. But the pitching was even better. And no one in baseball was more spectacular in 1971 than a 21-year-old lefthander named Vida Blue.

Blue simply dominated. He won 24 games and posted a 1.82 ERA. He worked over 300 innings. He was an easy, unanimous choice for the AL Cy Young Award. And he was a landslide winner in the MVP vote.

Right behind Blue in the rotation was Catfish. He won 21 games with an ERA of 2.96. Dobson was respectable in the 3-spot, making 30 starts, winning 15 games and finishing with an ERA of 3.81. Segui picked up ten wins in 21 starts. Odom was a little more mediocre, but his 4.29 ERA at the back end of the rotation was still manageable.

Getting to the bullpen wasn't going to offer an opposing offense much relief. Rollie was waiting. Fingers finished with an ERA of 2.99. Bob Locker, Darold Knowles, Jim Roland and Rom Kimkowski were all respectable arms. And in August, Oakland brought back Mudcat Grant, who had been traded in 1970. In his short stint, Grant posted a 1.98 ERA.

Collectively, Oakland's pitching was second in the American League for staff ERA. They were young, they had the horses and now, they were ready to get to the postseason. After spotting the rest of the division three games by getting swept to start the year, the A's took off.

They won 15 of their next 18 games. That stretch included a two-game sweep in Minnesota, the two-time defending AL West champs. It included a three-game sweep over the California Angels, who had also contended in 1970. And it included 2 of 3 from the Kansas City Royals, who would emerge as a contender in this 1971 season.

The Baltimore Orioles were the power of the AL East and the defending World Series champions. Oakland's early surge slowed when they split a two-game set with the Orioles and then split two more with the lowly Cleveland Indians. But the A's promptly took two straight from the Birds on the return trip east. By May 21, Oakland had a comfortable 6 ½ game lead on Minnesota and the Twins were coming to town for a three-game set.

Three days earlier, the A's had made a big early-season trade. Mincher was shipped to the Washington Senators (soon to relocate to Texas and swap divisions with Milwaukee). Mincher was the key piece in a multi-player deal that brought back another first baseman, Mike Epstein. Epstein would pick up where Mincher had left off, hitting 18 home runs the rest of the way in 1971 and finishing with a stat line of .368/.438.

Perhaps the deal underscored that the A's knew there was a long way to go and, good start or not, the Twins were still the team to beat until proven otherwise. Then Odom pitched Friday night's opener and was roughed up in a 10-1 loss.

The A's sent Catfish to the mound on Saturday afternoon to face another future Hall of Famer, the Twins' Jim Kaat. Oakland grabbed a couple of early runs thanks to base hits from Campaneris, Reggie and Tommy Davis. In the third inning, Reggie's single started a soft rally where he scored on a wild pitch and extended the lead to 3-0. Reggie finished the day with three hits. Davis drove in three runs. Catfish tossed a two-hitter. And the A's won 5-1.

Blue took the ball for Sunday's rubber match, and faced off with the reigning Cy Young Award winner, Jim Perry. In a scoreless tie in the fourth inning, Epstein hit a two-run homer. That was all Blue needed, dealing a five-hitter and winning 3-1.

In retrospect, it was the changing of the guard moment. The man who would win the Cy Young had beaten the reigning holder of that award, in a rubber match game where the future division champs knocked off the old guard.

By Memorial Day, Oakland was rolling at 32-17. They had a 7 ½ game margin on Minnesota, were plus-8 on Kansas City and up nine games over California.

The early summer saw no signs of letup. The Twins and Angels faded and would not return to contention. The Royals moved into second place. The A's had a nine-game lead when Kansas City visited Oakland on June 25 for a weekend set.

Blue pitched the opener and dealt another five-hitter against a contender, running his record to an astonishing 16-2. Epstein homered, Bando drove in three runs and the A's grabbed the opener 7-0. Epstein drove in three more runs on Saturday afternoon, keying a 4-2 win behind Hunter and some good relief work from Fingers. Odom pitched the finale, scattered seven hits and went the distance for a 3-0 shutout.

By the All-Star break, the AL West race was effectively broken wide open. Oakland was 56-31 and had an 11 ½ game lead on K.C. Then, at the All-Star Game itself, Reggie delivered the most memorable moment when he crushed a massive home run that hit the light tower at old Tiger Stadium. It was that kind of year for Oakland.

The A's went 23-8 through the month of August. At no point the rest of the way did the divisional lead slip below 10 games.

It was September 15, with two full weeks to play, that the clinching moment came. The magic number was two. Kansas City lost to California. Oakland, visiting Chicago, took the opening game of a doubleheader 3-2. When Grant got White Sox outfielder Jay Johnstone to fly out, it was time for the party to start.

## 1971 ALCS

The League Championship Series round was only in its third year of existence in 1971, but the Baltimore Orioles were already old hands at it. The Birds had swept what was then a best-of-five series the previous two years.

The series opened in Baltimore on a Sunday afternoon. The Orioles sent one of their four 20-game winners, Dave McNally, to face Blue.

Oakland showed no signs of cold feet with a second inning assault. In short order, Bando doubled, Angel Mangual tripled and Duncan doubled. The score was 2-0 and there was nobody out. Dick Green dropped down a sac bunt to move Duncan to third. Blue came to the plate.

Duncan was thrown out on the basepaths and that threat was ended. But in the top of the fourth, Mangual delivered again—a one-out RBI double that drove in Tommy Davis. The A's were up 3-zip and had the best pitcher in baseball on the mound.

In the bottom of the fourth, Davey Johnson and Merv Rettenmund hit back-to-back doubles, the first hits Blue had given up. Boog Powell singled to right. One run was in and there were runners on the corners with one out. Brooks Robinson was at the plate, but Blue got him to ground to Bando at third and start an inning-ending double play. Oakland's lead held at 3-1.

It stayed that way until the seventh, when Baltimore finally got to Blue. A leadoff walk issued to Frank Robinson was the original source of Blue's troubles. Brooks Robinson singled. After a flyball out, there were runners on the corners, but Blue was on the verge of escaping against the bottom of the order. Instead, 8-hitter Mark Belanger singled, cutting the lead to 3-2. Curt Motton, batting in McNally's spot, slashed a double. The game was tied 3-all with runners on second and third.



Paul Blair finished the job with a two-out, two-run double that gave Baltimore a 5-3 lead. Oakland had a threat in the eighth, after Campaneris led off the inning with a double, with Rudi and Reggie coming to the plate. But ace Oriole reliever Eddie Watt slammed the door and Baltimore took Game 1.

Prime-time baseball in LCS play was something else still a couple years off, so Monday's Game 2 started at 1 PM. Baltimore had another 20-game winner to go to, this one being Mike Cuellar. Oakland had another rising star in Catfish Hunter.

Oakland again got a leadoff double in the second, this one from Tommy Davis. This time the rally died with no runs. In the bottom of that inning, Rettenmund singled, but was thrown out trying to stretch into a double. Brooks Robinson responded with a solo home run. Two more singles, one by Cuellar, put two on with two outs. But Catfish got Don Buford to fly out. An inning that could have been big ended with just one run.

The Birds used the long ball again, this time off the bat of Boog Powell, to take a 2-0 lead in the third. Oakland finally got on the board in the fourth. Bando doubled and scored on a two-out base hit from Duncan. The A's threatened in the sixth when Reggie Jackson led off with a double and was bunted up to third.

Oakland was poised to tie the game...but Bando and Mangual were unable to drive in the run. Baltimore kept their 2-1 lead going into the late innings.

Hunter had been in control since the third, but the inability to keep the ball in the yard did him in again late. Elrod Hendricks homered for Baltimore. Powell went deep again in the eighth, this time a two-run blast. Cuellar went the distance. With a 5-1 win, the Orioles had held serve at home and were one win from the pennant.

The travel day had been lost when the opening of the series had to be postponed from its scheduled Saturday start date. That meant a long flight across the country and a quick turnaround with a day game on Tuesday. The difference between the rotations also started to show up. Segui was a good arm, to be sure. But Baltimore simply trotted out another 20-game winner—the future Hall of Famer Jim Palmer.

A couple of first-inning walks put Segui in immediate trouble, the bases loaded and no outs. But he sandwiched big strikeouts of Frank and Brooks Robinson around a sac fly from Hendricks. The Orioles only got one run.

It was Palmer's turn to get out of some trouble in the bottom of the first. With runners on first and second and one out, the Oriole starter got Mike Epstein and Bando to keep Oakland off the board.

The pattern continued in the top of the third. Baltimore had two on and one out. Frank Robinson hit a hard line drive...that went right at shortstop Campaneris who doubled off the runner and killed the threat. When Reggie homered in the bottom of the inning, we had a 1-1 tie.

Oakland had their chance to get the lead in the bottom of the fourth when Palmer issued a couple walks. But the bottom of the order was up. Green and Segui were retired. A game with a lot of action still had a tight 1-1 score.

The constant playing with fire got Segui burned in the top of the fifth though. Buford led off with a single. Powell worked a one-out walk. A Frank Robinson groundout moved both runners up, to second and third. Hendricks walked. Two outs, the bases loaded and Brooks Robinson at the plate. The hero of Baltimore's 1970 postseason run, Brooks knocked a single to center and picked up two runs. Dick Williams pulled Segui and brought in Rollie, but the damage was done.

Bando homered in the bottom of the sixth to cut the lead to 3-2. But the Orioles took out some insurance in the top of the seventh. A walk to Powell was followed by an RBI double from Frank Robinson, who in turn took third on a futile throw home. That enabled another run to score on a wild pitch. It was 5-2 and the Orioles could taste the champagne.

The A's made noise in the bottom of the eighth though. Reggie homered again to make it 5-3. Epstein singled. The tying run was coming to the plate in the person of Bando, who was enjoying a good series. But his groundball to short started a double-play. Palmer locked in and struck out the final four batters. Baltimore was officially 9-0 in ALCS play over three years and going back to the World Series.

There was no ALCS MVP honor awarded until 1980. Baltimore's balanced attack left them with several good candidates for a retroactive honor. Powell went 3-for-10 and homered twice. Davey Johnson also went 3-for-10. Buford and Blair had three hits apiece while starting just two games.

But the honor would have to go to Brooks Robinson. In going 4-for-11, he narrowly had the top batting average of any Oriole regular. He hit the home run that got Baltimore started in Game 2 and had the biggest hit of the clinching Game 3. None of the starting pitchers worked more than one game and no reliever stood out.

On Oakland's side, Bando and Reggie Jackson, with four hits apiece stood out. The lack of great outings from Blue and Hunter is ultimately what did the A's in. But they would be back.

## 1972

Reggie emerged as the team's best everyday player this season. He finished with an on-base percentage of .350 and slugged .473. His .265 batting average hurt him in terms of public perception, at a time when this stat was valued more than OBP. It's one explanation for why Jackson managed to finish an appalling 18<sup>th</sup> in the MVP voting and behind *four* of his own teammates.

One of those teammates was Rudi, who finished second for AL MVP. The leftfielder batted .305, though his OBP was a more pedestrian .345. He did slug .486, thanks to good power to the alleys, with 32 doubles. Epstein was a good power hitter, with 26 home runs. Campaneris built his reputation as a defensive wizard. Bando had an off-year in 1972, but Oakland still scored more runs than anyone in the American League.

The pitching had three horses leading the way in the rotation. Catfish, Ken Holtzman and Blue Moon Odom combined to win 55 games and all had ERAs at 2.51 or lower. And that doesn't even include Blue, who posted a 2.80 ERA. Blue, off his run to both the Cy Young and MVP awards in 1971, dealt with injuries, made only 23 starts and won just six games. But the fact a man with a 2.80 ERA, with his track record, was Oakland's *fourth* starter indicates how good the rotation was.

Rollie was the cornerstone of the bullpen at the age of 25. In an era when relievers were used with far more flexibility and creativity, Fingers won 11 games and saved 21 more. Dick Williams also got valuable relief work from veterans like Joe Horlen, Bob Locker and Darrell Knowles. The Oakland staff ranked second in the American League in ERA.

The season didn't start until April 15, due to a spring training lockout that would shorten the season by anywhere from six to eight games. When play finally did begin, Oakland was consistent, as they jousted with the Chicago White Sox and Minnesota Twins atop the AL West. The A's were 19-11 when the White Sox came to town for a three-game series on Memorial Day weekend.

Holtzman and Hunter delivered complete-game wins on Friday and Saturday, with help from Jackson's bat in each game. The Sunday finale went to extra innings tied 3-3. Fingers appeared to cough it up when he allowed a run in the 10<sup>th</sup> and then the first two Oakland batters were retired in the bottom of the inning. Then first baseman Mike Hegan singled to center to keep the game alive and 22-year-old reserve outfielder George Hendricks hit a two-run blast to win it and complete the sweep.

Consistency continued to mark Oakland's play up to a late All-Star break that didn't arrive until July 23. Minnesota fell off the pace. Chicago hung around and took three of four from Oakland

at the end of June. But the A's steadiness had them with a 56-35 record and 6 ½ game lead at the break.

Oakland stumbled in the latter part of July and early August, losing 11 of their first 19 out of the break. Chicago got hot and when they came west for another head-to-head matchup, the White Sox took the first two games and pulled into a first-place tie. Blue took the ball on Sunday with the division lead on the line and delivered a four-hit shutout to win 3-0.

The A's and White Sox still swapped first place back and forth for the last couple weeks in August. Oakland won five of six games against lowly Cleveland and AL East-leading Detroit to nudge out to a 2 ½ game edge when Labor Day arrived, signaling the start of the stretch drive.

Oakland and Chicago had a pair of two-game sets with each other in September and they collectively split those four games. The ten games in between were crucial—the A's went 7-3, while the White Sox were 5-5 and it gave Oakland a five-game margin with two weeks to go.

With six days to go, the A's had assured themselves at least a tie and played a midweek day game against the Twins with the chance to clinch for the home fans. Oakland dug themselves a 7-0 hole, as Odom was uncharacteristically poor. But they started to rally in the fifth and after eight innings the game was tied 7-7. In the bottom of the ninth, Sal Bando was hit by a pitch and then scored on a double by Dal Maxvill to wrap up another AL West crown.

The postseason was ahead. And what an October it would be. The cardiovascular capacity of the good people of Oakland was about to be tested.

## **1972 ALCS**

The early years of the American League Championship Series had been somewhat anticlimactic, with the Orioles sweeping each of the first three editions. The 1972 ALCS was different.

This year's rotation called for the series to begin with two games in Oakland. On a Saturday afternoon the A's gave the ball to Catfish. The Tigers countered with Mickey Lolich, the hero of their 1968 World Series triumph.

Norm Cash put Detroit on the board in the top of the second with a leadoff home run. After an Oakland rally in the bottom of that same inning fizzled, the A's tied it up in the third. Campaneris worked a one-out walk. Matty Alou singled to right, putting runners on the corners. Rudi's sac fly made it 1-1.

Both pitchers were settled in and no serious threat was made again until Oakland's half of the sixth, and even that was built on just an error and a walk. With one out, Gene Tenace's line drive to third was caught and Reggie was doubled off second base. The game stayed 1-1.

Detroit took their turn at threatening in the eighth when Ed Brinkman hit a leadoff double. The pitcher's spot was up next—the DH did not come to the American League until a year later. Lolich batted for himself, another factoid that can illuminate the way the game was played in this era. The pitcher struck out and Catfish escaped the jam.

Another leadoff double in the top of the ninth, this one by Duke Sims, prompted Oakland manager Dick Williams to go to his bullpen. Blue, who would pull substantial relief work in this postseason, came on. An error on a sac bunt put the Tigers with business with men on the corners and no outs. Williams came back out and summoned Rollie.

Rollie got Gates Brown to pop up, then induced a double-play ball from Jim Northrup. The A's had escaped and the 1-1 tie went to extra innings.

Detroit rightfielder Al Kaline was an aging legend, but still a productive one. And he greeted Fingers in the 11<sup>th</sup> with a solo blast. The Tigers had the lead. Sims then tripled to right. But Fingers again escaped. An opportunity to add some insurance was missed. And it would hurt.

Bando and Epstein both singled off Lolich, still in the game, to open the bottom of the 11<sup>th</sup>. Now it was Tiger manager Billy Martin's turn to go to his bullpen. He summoned Chuck Seelbach.

Tenance got a bunt down and both runners moved up. Gonzalo Marquez knocked a single to right and both runs came home. Oakland had won a 3-2 thriller.

The A's rolled that momentum into Sunday afternoon and Game 2. Campaneris led off the bottom of the first with a base hit, stole second, stole third, and scored on a single from Rudi. Blue Moon Odom was staked to a quick 1-zip lead.

Campaneris singled again to start the third. Alou's ground ball resulted in a forceout at second. Williams tried to gin up the running game again, but this time it backfired. Alou was cut down trying to steal second and Rudi's subsequent double went to waste.

Detroit starter Woodie Fryman got settled down and kept the game 1-0 until the bottom of the fifth. George Hendrick singled. Odom got down a sac bunt. The lineup flipped over and Campaneris delivered again, with a single that put runners on first and third. Alou's single made it 2-0 with runners still on the corners. Martin summoned Chris Zachary from the bullpen to try and stop the bleeding.

But Zachary uncorked consecutive wild pitches that put the A's up 3-0 with Alou on third. Rudi walked. Martin again went to the pen, this time Fred Scherman. It didn't work. Reggie doubled to left-center, both runs scored and it was 5-0.

This game was blown open and Odom was doing some serious dealing. He went the distance and allowed just three hits, all of them singles. The 5-0 final put the A's on the brink of a pennant as the series went to the Rustbelt.

But during those last few innings of Game 2, an incident happened that would reverberate through the rest of the series. Campaneris was beamed on the left ankle by Tiger reliever Lerrin LaGrow. Campy didn't take it well and hurled his bat back towards the mound. The A's shortstop was suspended. He could return if his team made the World Series, but he was sidelined for the rest of this ALCS.

The midweek sequence of games at old Tiger Stadium would all be in the daytime. Oakland sent lefty Ken Holtzman to the mound to try and win the pennant. Detroit sought to keep their season alive with Joe Coleman.

Alou had moved up to leadoff in place of Campaneris and opened the game with a double. Dal Maxvill worked a walk. After Coleman struck out Rudi, Williams put on a double steal and it paid off. Runners on second and third, one out and Reggie at the plate. But Coleman came up with another big strikeout, then he K'd Epstein for good measure. No runs on the board.

That inning would prove to be a trend. In seven of the nine innings, Oakland would put their leadoff man aboard. And they would never score. In the meantime, Bill Freehan hit a one-out double in the Detroit fourth that was sandwiched around a pair of walks. Holtzman got Mickey Stanley to fly to center and was on the verge of escaping. But Ike Brown knocked a two-out single and gave the Tigers a 2-0 lead.

Freehan homered in the eighth. Coleman kept pitching around baserunners and went the distance. Detroit's 3-0 win extended the series another day.

Pitching on three days' rest was common, if not the norm, in the baseball world of 1972. So we had a Catfish-Lolich rematch on tap for Wednesday afternoon's Game 4. And once again, the aces were dialed in.

Oakland threatened in the third with Alou's leadoff double, but he died there. Detroit got on the board in the bottom of that same inning when McAuliffe hit a leadoff home run. The Tigers went on to put runners on first and second with one out. Catfish bore down, struck out Cash and Northrup and kept it a 1-0 game. The pitchers kept dominating until the seventh. Then Epstein homered for the A's and were tied 1-1.

In the bottom of the eighth, McAuliffe worked a leadoff walk. Kaline bunted him up to second. Stanley beat out an infield hit, setting Detroit up with men on the corners and still just one out. Fingers came out of the Oakland bullpen.

Both of the great managers in this series believed in the running game. Although perhaps Martin's belief was a little too strong in this instance. With Freehan at the plate, Stanley tried to steal home. He was out. Fingers got out of the jam.

Blue pitched the ninth without incident for the A's, and Seelbach came on for Lolic as the game went to the 10<sup>th</sup>. With Blue's spot due to lead off the 10<sup>th</sup>, Marquez came off the bench to pinch-hit. He singled and promptly scored on another double from Alou. The A's had a 2-1 lead. Ted Kubiak poked an RBI single. It was 3-1, and Oakland was three outs from the World Series.

The thin reed on which Detroit's hopes hung could be bolstered by the fact that both Fingers and Blue were now out of the game. Bob Locker was on in relief to try and close it for the A's. For the third time in this Game 4, McAuliffe got action started, this time with a leadoff single. Kaline followed with a single of his own. Joe Horlen came on in relief for Oakland and promptly walked Gates Brown. There was still no one out and the Tigers had the winning runs on base.

As part of Williams' late-inning maneuvering, he had pinch-hit for second baseman Green. That resulted in Tenace, a natural catcher playing second base. The consequences of that arrived when Freehan came to the plate.

Freehan's ground ball to third could have been the double play ball the A's needed. Instead they got nothing. Tenace made an error on the throw. The bases were still loaded, there was still no one out, and now it was 3-2.

Williams made another relief move, this time going for Dave Hamilton. He walked Cash to tie the game. Northrup singled to right. Ballgame. The Tigers had won a dramatic 4-3 thriller, the second extra-inning turnabout in this series. And it set up Thursday afternoon's winner-take-all Game 5.

Detroit had all the momentum and they immediately rolled that over in the first inning against Odom. Once again, McAuliffe was the instigator, with a leadoff single. Sims worked a one-out walk. Tenace was back behind the plate, but his defensive struggles continued, with a passed ball that moved the runners to second and third. Freehan's groundout picked up the run.

Oakland needed to reverse fortune, and Reggie stepped up. After a leadoff walk, he stole second and moved up to third on a fly out. But Tenace's rough stretch continued with a strikeout. Risking a missed opportunity, Williams rolled the dice. Reggie tried to steal home. And he made it. The game was tied 1-1. But it did come out of a cost—the great outfielder tore up his knee on the slide and was done for the year.

In the top of the fourth, a McAuliffe error was followed by a sacrifice bunt. With two outs, Tenace came to the plate. His fortunes turned with a big RBI single. The A's had a 2-1 lead.

Odom was settled in, and in the fifth, he tried to help the cause with his bat. A leadoff double from the pitcher, followed by a sac bunt put the A's in business. But Maxvill popped out, Rudi fled to center and the 2-1 score held.

Blue came out of the bullpen and continued the great Oakland pitching. Not until the bottom of the eighth, did Detroit threaten. A leadoff single, followed by a sac bunt gave the heart of the order a couple shots at tying the game. But Blue got both Kaline and Sims.

That was Detroit's best chance. They got a one-out single from Cash in the ninth, but he stayed at first. When Blue got Tony Taylor to fly out to George Hendrick in center, the party could start in Oakland.

There was no ALCS MVP award given out until 1980. But the notable performers included Alou, who had eight hits over the five games and had assumed the leadoff spot after Campaneris was suspended. Catfish pitched over 15 innings in his two starts, and allowed just two runs.

On the Detroit side, Lolich had worked an amazing 19 innings in two starts, with an ERA of 1.42. None of the Tiger hitters had notable overall series numbers, but McAuliffe certainly made the most of his hits.

Then there's Odom. Over 14 innings, the only run scored off him was unearned. He won both of his starts, including the decisive Game 5. He would be my pick for a retroactive 1972 ALCS MVP. The A's were finally going to the World Series.

## **1972 WORLD SERIES**

The 1972 postseason had already given baseball fans plenty of drama. Both League Championship Series rounds had gone the distance and were marked by individual games that were tensely fought. The World Series was more of the same.

George Hendrick was getting a full-time opportunity for Oakland in this Series after Reggie's ALCS injury. Hendrick's two-out walk in the top of the second set up Gene Tenace's two-run blast and the A's had a quick 2-0 lead.

Cincinnati put together a rally in their own half of the second, starting with singles from Johnny Bench and Tony Perez. Denis Menke drew a walk and the bases were loaded with none out. Holtzman got Cesar Geronimo to pop out. Dave Concepcion's ground ball out scored a run. The Reds had cut the lead to 2-1, but a potential big inning ended right there.

Bench and Perez again got something going in the home half of the fourth, with a walk and single opening the frame. Menke's ground ball out brought in Bench from third and tied the game. But in the top of the fifth, Tenace immediately answered with another home run.



Oakland had a 3-2 lead, but Bench continued to be an instigator. The great Reds' catcher led off the bottom of the sixth with a double. r Dick Williams went to Rollie early. Fingers struck out Perez and Menke, got Geronimo and preserved the lead.

The Reds kept trying to grind out the tying run. Concepcion led off the seventh with a single, but Tenance cut him down on a stolen base attempt. Rose drew a two-out walk, prompting Williams to bring in Vida Blue to replace Fingers. A wild pitch and a walk put runners on first and second. But Blue got Bobby Tolan to pop up.

And in the ninth, Hal McRae hit a leadoff single. Subsequent productive outs moved the tying run to third base with Pete Rose at the plate. Blue got Rose on a grounder to second and the A's had a road win.

Oakland had Catfish primed for Game 2. Cincinnati went with Ross Grimsley. Only 22-years-old, Grimsley had been the hero in a must-win spot in the NLCS. Both pitchers were dialed in on this Sunday afternoon.

The A's were able to touch Grimsley early, when Bando led off the second with a base hit. With two outs, the bottom of the order came through. Dick Green singled, and so did Catfish, aiding his cause and putting Oakland on the board. A subsequent single from Campaneris resulted in Rose throwing out Green at the plate to keep the score 1-0.

Bench and Perez again were the ignitors of the Cincinnati lineup, with an infield hit and a walk, that was then followed by an errant pickoff throw from Catfish. There were runners on second and third and none out. But the bottom of the order was up. Catfish struck out Menke, Geronimo, and Grimsley in succession and there was no damage.

Rudi homered for the A's in the top of the third to make it 2-0, and the pitchers completely took over after that. Not until the bottom of the ninth did anything resembling a significant threat take place. Perez singled and took second on a force out. With two down, McRae's base hit scored the first Cincy run. Rollie came out of the bullpen to face Julian Javier, who was batting in the pitcher's spot. Rollie got a pop up and the game ended 2-1.

The weekend had seen two excellent baseball games, and great pitching. But that was little consolation for the Reds, who were staring at a 2-0 series deficit as they got on the plane west.

A travel day and a rain delay meant the World Series didn't resume until Wednesday night in Oakland. Odom was going for the A's. Jack Billingham shouldered the burden for the Reds.

Both pitchers were spectacular. Through six innings, Cincinnati had just one hit. Oakland had two—both of them infield singles. A scoreless tie went into the top of the seventh. It was Perez, again in the middle of the action, who got it started with a single. Menke got a bunt down to

move Perez into scoring position with one out. And Geronimo delivered a base knock that scored the first run of Game 3.

It would prove to be the only run. Cincinnati threatened again in the eighth, with runners on second and third and one out. Fingers struck out Bench and kept it a one-run game. But the insurance wasn't needed. Billingham went eight strong. Clay Carroll closed it out. With the 1-0 win, the Reds were back in the Series.

More great pitching followed on Thursday night, with Holtzman going on three days' rest for the A's, and facing the young Reds starter Don Gullett. It was scoreless until the fifth, nary a real threat to be found. Tenace hit his third home run of the Series to break the ice of the bottom of that fifth frame.

It took until the top of the eighth for the Reds to threaten. It started softly, with Concepcion beating out an infield hit and getting bunted up to second. With two outs, the lefty Blue came out of the bullpen to face the lefty Joe Morgan. The pitching change didn't work. Morgan kept the inning alive with a walk. Tolan doubled down the rightfield line. Both runners scored, and Cincinnati was ahead 2-1.

Pedro Borbon had come in in relief in the eighth and was now tasked with evening up the Series. Gonzalo Marquez greeted him with a pinch-hit single. Manager Sparky Anderson didn't hesitate and called on Carroll, his regular closer. Tenace singled. The bottom of the order was up, and Williams continued to empty out his bench. Don Mincher hit a pinch-hit single and the game was tied 2-2. Angel Mangual got the third pinch-hit of the inning. Ballgame. In a dramatic final two innings, the A's had moved to within one game of a championship.

Moreover, Oakland had another home game in tow, and Catfish going to the mound for Friday afternoon's Game 5. Cincinnati's Jim McGlothlin had to try and keep his team's season alive.

Rose sought to establish momentum quickly and homered off of Catfish to begin the game. In the second inning, Perez doubled and was bunted to third. But Catfish got Geronimo to pop up, that inning came up empty, and Oakland got it going in their own half of the second.

Mike Epstein drew a walk to start. Hendrick beat out an infield hit. Tenace continued to have the Series of his life—a three-run jack that put Oakland up 3-1.

Now, Cincinnati was playing from behind in a desperate spot. Menke responded in the top of the fourth with a solo blast that cut the lead in half. But in the bottom of the fourth, a leadoff walk to Bando prompted Sparky to go to his bullpen for Borbon. Hendrick got down a bunt. Tenace was intentionally walked. That set up Marquez for an early pinch-hit opportunity, batting in the 8-spot for second baseman Dick Green. Marquez delivered the RBI single and moved Tenace to third. It was 4-2, and it might have gotten worse—but Tenace was picked off third.

Morgan drew a two-out walk in the top of the fifth. Tolan hit a deep single to right. Running on contact, and having good speed, Morgan came all the way around to score a big run and cut the lead to 4-3. Williams again chose not to mess around and called in Fingers early.

Rollie settled things down and the A's held that 4-3 lead into the eighth inning. With the hour late, Morgan again worked a walk. He stole second, setting himself up to again score on a single by Tolan. We had a 4-4 tie.

In the top of the ninth, Geronimo singled. Grimsley, who had come out of the bullpen in the eighth, stayed in the game and got a bunt down. An error by Bando put runners on the corners. Rose came to the plate. He had started the good things for the Cincinnati offense on this night back in the first and he delivered again here—an RBI single that put the Reds on top and chased Fingers.

Concepcion, who had reached on the Bando error, was on third and there was still only one out. Morgan lifted a fly ball to right. But Alou stopped the insurance run by throwing out Concepcion at the plate.

After the way the previous night had ended, no one in Cincinnati could rest too comfortably with a 5-4 lead. And Tenace started the bottom of the ninth with a walk. Ted Kubiak's bunt popped into the air and turned into an out. Billingham, on a single day's rest after pitching eight innings in Game 3, came out of the bullpen.

Dave Duncan singled. The tying run was on third in the person of pinch-runner Odom and there was still only one out. Campaneris popped one up behind first base. Morgan ran over to make the catch. Odom decided to gamble and try and score. He made it closer than one might have expected, but Morgan threw him out. The Reds had the 5-4 win. They had taken two of three on the road. And the Series would return to Cincinnati.

The rain earlier in the week wiped out the travel day, so it was a long flight followed by a Saturday afternoon Game 6. Blue returned to his normal role as a starter for Oakland, facing Nolan.

Cincy threatened early with Morgan, getting hot as the Series went on, doubling with one out and taking third on a throwing error. But Blue got Tolan to pop up and escaped. The first run of the game didn't come until Bench's solo homer in the fourth put the Reds on the board. And the A's immediately answered in the top of the fifth, with Bando singling and then scoring on Green's double. Grimsley immediately came out of the Cincinnati bullpen to keep it a 1-1 game.

McRae led off the bottom of the fifth with a double. A productive groundball from Menke and a sacrifice fly by Concepcion put the Reds back in front, 2-1. With two outs in the bottom of the sixth, Tolan's base hit chased Blue. Tolan stole second and scored on Perez's single.

Dave Hamilton was pitching for Oakland in the seventh when Cincinnati broke it open. With one out, Concepcion singled and stole second. Rose drew a two-out walk. Morgan's single made it 4-1 and the throw home left runners on second and third, in position to score on Tolan's base hit. A wild pitch and two walks later, Geronimo delivered another two-RBI single. The only blowout game in this World Series ended 8-1 for the Reds. And were going to Game 7.

It would be a big Sunday for sports in these two cities. In the NFL, the Raiders and Bengals were both off to good starts, and each were playing in the late afternoon time slot. But in an era when baseball was still the national pastime, the mood of each city would rise and fall by what happened in the early afternoon at Riverfront Stadium.

Oakland needed to get momentum turned back around and they got some help in the first. An error in the outfield by Tolan put Angel Mangual on third base with one out. A Rudi fly ball was too short to score the run, but Tenace delivered with a two-out single for a 1-0 lead.

Odom and Billingham reprised their Game 3 battle, and both pitchers were on in the early going. After the unearned run, Billingham settled in. And the Reds didn't threaten against Odom until the fifth. Perez hit a lead off double. After two walks, the bases were loaded with one out. With all hands on deck, it was Catfish that got the call from the bullpen. McRae's sacrifice fly tied the game 1-1, but Catfish limited the damage right here.

Borbon came out of the Cincinnati bullpen in the top of the sixth and was greeted with a leadoff single from Campaneris. Mangual put a bunt down successfully, but with two outs, the A's were at risk of missing the opportunity. Until Tenace ripped a double for the lead. And Bando ripped another double to make it 3-1.

In the bottom of the eighth, Rose sought to ignite a rally with a leadoff single. Holtzman came out of the bullpen to create a lefty-lefty matchup with Morgan. Again, Morgan beat the lefthander. He doubled and there were runners on second and third. It was Fingers' turn to try and quell the damage and hold the lead.

Joe Hague popped up and Bench was intentionally walked. With the bases loaded, Perez's sac fly cut the lead to 3-2. With runners now on first and third, Bench stole second. The go-ahead run was in scoring position. With peak tension, Menke came to the plate. Fingers got him on a fly ball to left. The one-run lead was still intact.

Fingers got the first two batters in the ninth and the pitcher's spot was due up. Darrell Chaney came off the bench to pinch-hit. Fingers plunked him. The lineup was flipping over and the Reds were still alive. But Rose flew out to left. And the Oakland A's were champs.

Gene Tenace was an easy choice for 1972 World Series MVP—he had gone 8-for-23, tied a World Series record with four home runs and gotten a two-out RBI hit for the go-ahead run in Game 7.

The other notable Oakland performers were on the pitching staff—Catfish had won Game 2 and picked up the Game 7 win in relief, finishing with a 2.81 ERA for the series. Holtzman's series ERA was 2.13 over 12 innings of work. Odom had been outstanding for the second straight postseason round, going 11 innings with a buck-59 ERA. And Fingers appeared in six games, worked over ten innings, and posted a 1.74 ERA.

Perez was clearly the best player for Cincinnati, collecting ten hits, seemingly all of them significant. The problem for the Reds was that even though their other great players—Rose, Bench, Morgan, and Tolan—all had their moments, they collectively went 22-for-101 (.218) for the Series. The Oakland arms had ground the Big Red Machine to a halt.

The great dynasty of the early 1970s had begun.

## 1973

1972 was the breakthrough year. 1973 was the time to build on the success.

Reggie led the way, with one of the great seasons of his Hall of Fame career. He hit 32 home runs, drove in 117 runs, scored 99 more and won the MVP award. He got support from Bando, who popped 29 home runs, drove in 98 runs and scored 97. Tenace, moved into the everyday lineup after his heroics in October of 1972, hit 24 homers.

Bill North set the table for the offense with a .376 on-base percentage and he stole 53 bases. Campaneris added 34 steals to his excellent defensive play. Deron Johnson, the 34-year-old who got playing time in the newly created American League role of designated hitter, hit 19 home runs. It was all enough to make up for an off-year by Rudi and produce the best-scoring offense in the American League.

The pitching was awfully good again, with Holtzman, Catfish and Blue each winning 20 games. Rollie came out of the bullpen and posted 1.92 ERA. Even with a down year from Odom, the A's had the second-best staff ERA in the league.

Oakland stumbled out of the gate and lost seven of their first ten to AL West rivals Kansas City, Minnesota and Chicago. The A's found their footing, but on Memorial Day they were still just 23-21 and in fifth amidst a packed Western Division.

Five straight losses to the Tigers and Yankees out of the holiday didn't lift anyone's spirits and Oakland fell six games off the pace. But an 8-4 homestand in early June against AL East teams got things looking back upward. An eight-game road swing against the Royals and White Sox produced five victories. When those same two teams made the return trip west, Oakland won five of six.

They were tied for first by early July and an 11-5 stretch going into the All-Star break opened up a 2 ½ game lead on Kansas City. Chicago had basically switched places with Oakland over the early part of the summer, as the White Sox fell to .500 and fifth place.

The A's stumbled out of the break, losing three straight in Minnesota. By August 9, the Royals had nudged a half-game into the lead, while everyone else in the AL West had faded to sub-.500 and would not recover.

Oakland again got well against the AL East, ripping off fourteen wins in fifteen games and rebuilding their lead back to five. On Labor Day weekend in Kansas City, the champs had the opportunity to drive a dagger into the heart of the young challenger. But the A's pitching failed

them—they gave up 23 runs in three games. Only an offensive outburst by Bando in the Friday opener—two home runs, including an inside-the-park job, salvaged a single win.

The AL West lead was still four games on September 10, when Kansas City arrived in Oakland to start the final three weeks of the regular season. This time, the A's didn't miss their chance. Blue threw a complete-game four-hitter, while Bando's three hits led a balanced offensive assault in a 13-0 win. Glenn Abbott went the distance to win the second game 3-1. Even though Holtzman lost the finale, Oakland's lead was still a comfortable five games.

And it never got closer. On the season's penultimate Sunday, the A's clinched. Rudi and Bando combined to drive in seven runs in a 10-5 win over the White Sox. It was the third straight division crown and it set up Oakland's chance at their second straight World Series.

## **1973 ALCS**

The Orioles were back in the postseason, so this series was a chance for the A's to avenge their ALCS loss from 1971. This series would see the first two games played at Baltimore's old Memorial Stadium, and the balance played at Oakland Alameda-County Coliseum.

The Orioles sent Cy Young Award winner and future Hall of Famer Jim Palmer to the mound to face Blue in Saturday afternoon's Game 1. Palmer started a little wild, walking the first two batters he faced, before recovering to strike out the side. And then Baltimore quickly got after Blue.

Merv Rettenmund started the home half of the first by beating out an infield hit. Paul Blair drew a one-out walk. Tommy Davis doubled to score one run and put runners on second and third. Don Baylor worked a walk. With the bases loaded, Blue struck out Brooks Robinson and was on the verge of escaping. But the young catcher, Earl Williams, tagged Blue for a two-run double that made it 3-0 and sent the Oakland start to an early shower. Mark Belanger tacked on an RBI base hit before it was over.

Staked to a 4-0 lead, Palmer settled in and delivered a vintage complete-game five-hitter, striking out 12 along the way. The Oakland bullpen kept Baltimore at bay until late in the game when the Orioles got add-on runs in the seventh and eighth. The final was 6-0.

The defending champs were in a hole, but they only needed to get a split in Baltimore to shift homefield advantage their way, and Catfish got the ball for the A's in Game 2. Dave McNally was on the hill for the Orioles on Sunday afternoon.

Oakland needed momentum and Campaneris wasted little time in giving it to them. Campy opened the game with a solo home run. But Baltimore struck again in the first inning. Al Bumbry got it started with a leadoff walk. Rich Coggins singled to put runners on the corners and Davis

picked up the run with an RBI groundball. We were tied 1-1. Catfish and McNally both locked in and that score held until the sixth inning.

The A's again used the long ball. Rudi and Bando hit back-to-back homers to open the top of the sixth. The Orioles again moved to answer right back. Trailing 3-1, Coggins and Davis opened the bottom of the sixth with base hits. A one-out double from Williams cut the lead to 3-2. There were runners on second and third. Catfish needed a big out and he got out when Blair popped up. Oakland's lead had been halved, but it was intact.

Campaneris beat out an infield hit with one out in the top of the eighth, and then stole second. The stolen base proved superfluous, as Bando homered again. The A's had breathing room at 5-2, but the trend of the Orioles bouncing back right away continued. Davis and Williams both singled. With one out, Rollie came out of the A's bullpen.

Fingers got Terry Crowley to fly out, but Brooks Robinson came up with a two-out single to cut the lead to 5-3. The lead run was at the plate. When Bobby Grich drew a walk, the bases were loaded. Power-hitting Don Baylor came up. Rollie got him on a groundball to short.

A single, a bunt, a passed ball, and an RBI knock from Campaneris gave Oakland some insurance they could use in the ninth. This time, there was no Baltimore bounceback. Rollie closed out the 6-3 win and this series was heading west tied at a game apiece.

After a day for travel, play resumed on Tuesday. Prime-time games in the postseason were still reserved for the World Series, so this Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday run would all be during the afternoon. And it began with an epic pitcher's duel between Holtzman and Baltimore's Mike Cuellar.

Earl Williams put the Birds on the board when he homered in the second inning. It wasn't until the fourth that the A's got their first hit of the game. It wasn't until the seventh that anyone even threatened again. That came when a walk and an error gave Baltimore some chance for insurance. But Holtzman pitched around it, keyed by a double play ball off the bat of Baylor. And the 1-0 score held to the bottom of the eighth.

Jesus Alou came off the Oakland bench to pinch-hit and blooped a double to get things started. Mike Andrews put down a sacrifice bunt. With the tying run on third and one out, Cuellar struck out Campaneris. It was up to Rudi. In one of the most significant at-bats in the great Oakland Dynasty of this decade, Rudi singled to left-center. We were tied.

Extra innings came. One thing that didn't come was a relief pitcher. Holtzman and Cuellar kept at it. In the bottom of the 11<sup>th</sup>, Cuellar finally blinked. Campaneris homered and the A's had a 2-1 win for the game and a 2-1 lead in the series.



Oakland would send Blue back to the mound for Game 4 to get the pennant. Baltimore went back to Palmer to try and live another day. The Oriole ace didn't have it. Tenace led off the bottom of the second with a double. Vic Davalillo singled to left. With one out, Ray Fosse's double picked up both runs. Dick Green doubled, and it was 3-0. With no room for error, Baltimore manager Earl Weaver came out to get the ball from Palmer. Bob Reynolds now held the Oriole season in his hands.

Reynolds settled everything down, but Blue was dealing. He didn't allow a hit until the fourth. He didn't allow so much as a threat through six. He got an extra run to work with in the bottom of the sixth when Tenace walked, took third on a Davalillo single and scored on a sac fly from Fosse. It was 4-0 and Oakland was nine outs from going back to the World Series.

In the blink of an eye, it all changed. With one out in the seventh, Earl Williams walked, Baylor singled, Brooks Robinson singled, and it was 4-1. Andy Etchebarren homered. In a stunning development, we were tied 4-4. Fingers came on for Blue.

Oakland threatened in their own half of the seventh, with runners on first and second and one out. Grant Jackson came out of the Oriole bullpen and got both Reggie Jackson and Tenace. In the top of the eighth, Grich homered. It was 5-4 and Grant Jackson closed the game without further incident. The Orioles had a 5-4 win fueled by unlikely heroes in Reynolds, Jackson, and Etchebarren. And Palmer, having barely broken a sweat, was available for the decisive Game 5.

But another future Hall of Fame arm was also available for Game 5 and that was Catfish. Baltimore would hope that young Doyle Alexander could weather any storms early on.

After two scoreless innings, the Orioles made the game's first mistake—an error by Brooks Robinson at third. A subsequent bunt set up a two-out RBI single from Rudi for the game's first run. In the fourth, the A's struck with two outs. A Davalillo triple was sandwiched by singles from Tenace and Alou. It was 3-0 and Palmer came out of the bullpen.

The Oriole ace redeemed himself well, pitching two-hit ball the rest of the way and keeping Oakland locked on "3". But Catfish was too good. He took a no-hitter into the fifth. He allowed just five hits overall. Baltimore never seriously threatened. When Grich grounded out to Campaneris in the ninth, the 3-0 score was a final and the party was on in the Bay Area.

Had there been an ALCS MVP in 1973, it's hard to imagine it going to anyone other than Catfish. He won Game 2 when his team's back was close to the wall. He won Game 5 when his team was literally against the wall. He worked 16 innings in those two games with a 1.65 ERA.

Honorable mention would go to Campaneris, who went 7-for-21 and homered twice, including the big momentum-turning blast to open Game 2. The speedy Campy also stole three bases. And there has to be a hat-tip to Holtzman for his magnificent 11-inning gem to win Game 3.

On the Baltimore side, Cueller would deserve a similar hat tip. Palmer had the Game 1 shutout and the strong Game 5 relief outing, while his Game 4 travails didn't end up hurting. Earl Williams was the best everyday player for the Birds, going 5-for-18 with four RBIs, while Davis ended up with six hits for the series.

Oakland was on their way back to the World Series.

## **1973 WORLD SERIES**

The A's were the defending champions and looking to repeat. The New York Mets had a recent title themselves, from 1969, but had also been in last place as recently as August. These two teams, taking different routes to get here, played an exciting Fall Classic.

The Series opened in Oakland on a Saturday afternoon. The A's sent Holtzman to the mound to face the Mets' Jon Matlack. Both teams had gotten here with pitching and Game 1 put that on display.

With two outs in the bottom of the third, Holtzman was at the plate (the designated hitter, just introduced in the American League this season, was not used in World Series play until 1976). He doubled to left. A subsequent error allowed him to score. Campaneris, the A's leadoff hitter who was the beneficiary of the error, stole second and scored on a base hit by Rudi. With a pair of unearned runs, Oakland had the lead.

Those two runs are all the A's would get off Matlack, but they were all they would need. New York got one back in the top of the fourth when Cleon Jones doubled and scored on a single from John Milner. But there were otherwise no serious threats. Holtzman went the first five innings. Rollie came out of the bullpen and went 3 1/3, leaving after a one-out walk in the ninth. Darnold Knowles came on and closed out the 2-1 win.

Sunday afternoon's Game 2 would have some more offensive spice, and it would end with plenty of drama, both on and off the field. Oakland quickly got after New York starter Jerry Koosman in the bottom of the first.

With one out, Rudi doubled and Bando tripled. Koosman struck out Reggie and appeared poised to limit the damage. But Jesus Alou doubled to left. Blue had been staked to a 2-zip lead.

Cleon Jones quickly got one of those runs back with a home run to lead off the second. The A's responded in their own half of the second. Campaneris tripled with one out and scored on another key hit from Rudi. The Mets came right back with the long ball—Wayne Garrett hit a solo blast in the third to cut the lead to 3-2.

The back and forth by the lineups continued in the Oakland third. A walk, single, and error loaded the bases with one out. Koosman was lifted for Ray Sadecki, who benefitted from overly aggressive A's baserunning. Tenace tried to steal home and was out. Green struck out.

The game stayed 3-2 and settled down a bit until the top of the sixth. Cleon Jones was again the instigator for the Mets, this time with his patience—he drew a one-out walk. That was followed by John Milner's single, putting runners on the corners. Blue was pulled and Horacio Pena came out of the Oakland bullpen.

Pena promptly plunked Jerry Grote to load the bases. Don Hahn legged out an infield hit to tie the game, and Bud Harrelson singled to right to put the Mets up 4-3. The bases were still loaded and Knowles was brought on in relief.

Knowles got Jim Beauchamp to tap one back to the mound. It was tailor-made for at least a force at home, and perhaps an inning-ending double-play. It ended with a Knowles error on the throw home. Two runs scored. It was 6-3, there were runners on second and third and still one out. Knowles came up with a strikeout of Garrett and got Rusty Staub to fly to center. It was a disastrous inning, but it could have been worse. And leaving those runners out there would be significant.

Tug McGraw was on for the Mets in the bottom of the seventh. With one out, he hit Campaneris with a pitch and walked Rudi, setting up the middle of the order. Bando struck out, but Reggie doubled to right to score a run and put runners on second and third. Tenace struck out to end the inning.

The 6-4 score held to the bottom of the ninth, with McGraw still on the hill. Deron Johnson tagged him for a double. McGraw got Campaneris and Rudi and was an out away from putting this one to bed. Bando worked a walk. Reggie delivered another big hit, an RBI single that made it 6-5 and left runners on first and third. Tenace got another big two-out RBI chance and he made the most of this one—a single tied it up 6-6 and forced extra innings.

Rollie was on for Oakland and the Mets threatened in the top of the 10<sup>th</sup>. Harrelson singled and was bunted up to second. A Tenace error created a first-and-third situation with one out. Milner lifted a flyball to left. Harrelson tried to tag. Rudi threw him out at the plate. The game was still tied 6-6 and stayed that way until the 12<sup>th</sup>.

Fingers and McGraw were both still pitching. Harrelson went the other way for a double into the right-centerfield gap. McGraw was up and he bunted. He also beat it out. The Mets were in serious business—at least until Rollie struck out Garrett and got Felix Millan to pop out.

The legendary Willie Mays came to the plate. One of the great players of all-time, Mays was in his final year and a shadow of what he used to be. He still had a moment right here—a two-out

RBI single in extra innings of a World Series game. The Mets led 7-6 and there were runners on first and second.

After Cleon Jones singled, came two plays that would overshadow Mays' clutch delivery. Oakland second baseman Mike Andrews made two consecutive errors. Collectively, they scored three runs and gave New York insurance they would need. The A's did get a run back in their own half of the 12<sup>th</sup>, and put two men aboard. But George Stone, normally a starter, came out of the Met bullpen to secure the 10-7 win.

The game had been a thriller, but also something less than a clinic. Finley singled out Andrews. He pressured the infielder to sign a medical statement that he was injured, which would have allowed him to be replaced on the roster. The A's clubhouse was furious, as was Dick Williams. Commissioner Bowie Kuhn was none too happy either, refusing Finley's scam, and publicly rebuking the owner. It was embarrassing to Andrews, embarrassing to baseball and overshadowed what should have been a special moment in the twilight of Mays' extraordinary career.

On Tuesday night, the on-field drama resumed at Shea Stadium in Queens. The Game 3 pitching matchup was a showdown of greats, Catfish for the A's and Tom Seaver for the Mets.

New York, riding a little momentum, got a leadoff home run from Garrett in the bottom of the first. That was immediately followed by base hits from Millan and Staub. A wild pitch scored another run and put Staub on second. There were still none out. But now was when Catfish got settled in—he struck out Cleon Jones, struck out Grote and got Hahn to line to left, keeping it a 2-0 game.

Catfish then began to dominate. The only other New York threat the rest of the way came in the fourth, when Hahn led off with a double, but didn't come around. Hunter worked six innings, but the bullpen work of Knowles, Paul Lindblad, and Rollie, kept it up. The challenge for Oakland was doing anything against Seaver.

In the sixth, the A's finally got on the board, when Bando doubled with one out, and Tenace did the same with two outs. In the eighth, trailing 2-1, Campaneris led off with a single, stole second, and scored the tying run on a single to right by Rudi. Bando successfully bunted Rudi into scoring position. But Seaver got Reggie and Tenace to keep the game tied.

Oakland got a gift to start the ninth when Millan made a leadoff error. Pat Borque then beat out his bunt effort. McGraw again came out of the bullpen. And he again did the job. Another bunt put runners on second and third with one out. But a big strike out of Angel Mangual proved the key to forcing another extra-inning game.

The problem was, the Met bats were doing nothing. In the eleventh inning, a walk and a passed ball gave Campaneris an opportunity with two outs. The clutch shortstop delivered with an RBI single.

New York got a lead off single from Garrett in the bottom of the 11<sup>th</sup>, and he was bunted up, prompting the entry of Fingers. Rollie got Staub to fly to center and Cleon Jones to ground out to short. Oakland had a 3-2 win in Game 3, and a 2-1 lead for the series.

Matlack and Holtzman rematched in Wednesday night's Game 4. Matlack reprised his Game 1 excellence. Holtzman wasn't as sharp. In the bottom of the first, Garrett led off with a single to right. Millan beat out a bunt, and Staub homered. The Mets had a quick 3-0 lead. After a walk and a single, Holtzman was yanked for Blue Moon Odom, who got Hahn to ground into a 5-4-3 double-play.

Odom again got a double-play ball to escape a tight spot in the third. Oakland got a run back in the fourth when a one-out error was followed by a base hit from Reggie and an RBI groundout by Tenace. The possibility that the Mets would look back with regret on their early missed chances was real. Until the bottom of that same inning.

Hahn and Harrelson began the New York fourth with singles, prompting the removal of Odom and the entry of Knoles. Garrett was hit by a pitch. Oakland's defensive issues at second base continued when Dick Green made an error to score a run and keep the bases loaded. Staub singled to right to plate two more. It was 6-1.

Even though another double-play ball cost the Mets some more runs, this wouldn't matter. Matlack went eight strong, Sadecki closed it by striking out Campaneris with the bases loaded. The 6-1 score had stood up and the World Series was tied at two games apiece.

Blue and Koosman returned to the mound for Thursday night's Game 5 and both were sharp. Cleon Jones continued his strong World Series by leading off the second with a double and then scoring on a base hit by Milner. Blue pitched around trouble in the fourth when Milner couldn't get a sac bunt down with two on and none out. In the sixth, the Mets picked up a run when Grote singled with two outs, and then Hahn tripled. Blue was removed, but at 2-0, he had done his job.

Koosman was doing his job even better. Not until the fourth, when Bando singled, did Oakland get a hit. Not until the seventh did the A's mount a serious threat. Tenace led off with a walk and Fosse doubled, to put runners on second and third with one out. McGraw came out of the bullpen.

After Deron Johnson walked to load the bases, McGraw got Mangual to pop out, then struck out Campaneris. The 2-0 lead was preserved, McGraw closed the game without further incident,

and the Mets' improbable run that had started in late August was now one win from a World Series title.

The planes flew back west and Saturday afternoon's Game 6 would feature Seaver and Catfish. Both teams threatened right away in the first inning. New York put two aboard with one out, but Catfish got Cleon Jones and Milner to fly out. Seaver wasn't quite as fortunate. With two outs and a man aboard, Reggie Jackson doubled to left center and the A's had the game's first run.

Reggie came through again in the bottom of the third. Bando had gotten aboard with a single, and with two outs, Jackson went to right-center with this double and gave Oakland a 2-0 lead.

Seaver and Catfish both took over, and no one threatened again until the top of the eighth. With one out, the Mets got a base hit from Ken Boswell, which prompted the entry of Knowles from the A's bullpen. But Garrett and Millan singled in succession. The lead was down to 2-1, there were runners on first and third, there was still just one out and the meat of the order was up.

With Oakland's hopes for a repeat title hanging in the balance, Knowles struck out Staub. Then he got Cleon Jones to fly out. The lead was preserved. Reggie led the way to get an important insurance run in the bottom of the inning—he singled, and went all the way to third on an outfield error, enabling him to score on a sac fly. Rollie pitched the ninth, it ended 3-1 and for the third straight year, the World Series would see a Game 7.

The sports fans of both cities had no conflict of interest on Sunday afternoon—John Madden's contending Raider football team was conveniently scheduled for Monday Night Football this week. Neither New York team, the Jets or Giants, were contending in 1973. So the World Series was the only game in town.

For the third time in the series, it would be Holtzman and Matlack. Each had a win. In their Game 4 matchup, it was Holtzman who had early problems. This time, Matlack got roughed up early on.

Holtzman did damage with his bat by doubling to left with one out in the bottom of the third. Campaneris homered. Rudi singled. Reggie homered. Oakland had a commanding 4-0 lead.

In the fifth, Campaneris singled, moved up to second on an outfield error and then scored on an RBI base hit from Rudi. The A's led 5-0 and had just twelve outs left to get.

The Mets didn't make any kind of move offensively until the top of the sixth, when Millan and Staub each doubled with one out to make it 5-1. Fingers immediately came out of the A's bullpen to get Cleon Jones and Milner and keep the Oakland lead comfortable.

Rollie kept on dealing until the ninth, when Milner worked a one-out walk and Hahn singled to right. Harrelson tried to beat out a bunt but was thrown out. The A's were on the brink. Ed

Kranepool hit a groundball to first. This should have been it, but an error by Tenace scored a run and brought the tying run to the plate in the person of Garrett.

Dick Williams decided to go with Knowles to get the last out. Garrett popped up to Campaneris. The 5-2 final—and the 1973 World Series—were in the books.

Reggie was voted World Series MVP. He had gone 9-for-29, drove in six runs, and made his biggest impact early in the must-win Game 6. He was the correct choice. Honorable mention can go to Rudi, who collected nine hits. Oakland also won both Catfish-Seaver showdowns, with Hunter getting the win in Game 6.

It's easy to see why Dick Williams had no hesitation about going to his bullpen with what was, by the standards of the era, great frequency. Fingers appeared in six games, worked over 13 innings and finished with an 0.66 ERA. Knowles pitched in all seven games and didn't allow an earned run in his 6 1/3 innings of work.

On the Met side, Cleon Jones went 8-for-28, while Staub went 11-for-26 with six ribbies. McGraw did good work out of the bullpen. His 2.63 ERA, while good, isn't dazzling for a short series. But he pitched in five games, and his work in a critical Game 2 was exceptional.

New York would take a step back from the spotlight after this season. Not until 1984, with the arrival of Dwight Gooden, Darryl Strawberry, and Davey Johnson, did the Mets seriously contend again.

Oakland would go through offseason changes—Williams, frustrated by ownership, resigned. It was the first crack in a great dynasty, but the consequences would not be seen immediately.

## 1974

For a two-time defending World Series champion, the 1974 Oakland A's entered the season in a bit of flux. They had a new manager. Alvin Dark was the new man in charge. But the players on the field were fundamentally the same and that added up to the same result—a third straight World Series title in Oakland.

Pitching was the key and a Cy Young season from Catfish led the way. Hunter worked 318 innings, astonishing even by the workhorse standards of the day and won 25 games with a 2.49 ERA. Blue and Holtzman each had ERAs in the low 3s and combined for 36 more wins. Rollie worked 119 innings and posted a 2.65 ERA. These four arms carried the A's to the American League's best ERA.

The everyday lineup produced the 2-3-4 finishers in the American League MVP voting. Rudi drove in 99 runs and finished second. Bando drove in 103 and came in third. Reggie actually had the best year of any of them. Reggie finished with a .391 on-base percentage, slugged .574, hit 29 home runs, drove in 93 runs, scored 90 more and stole 25 bases. It was a magnificent all-around campaign.

The Jackson-Bando-Rudi trio got support from Tenace, who hit 26 home runs. Campaneris at short and North in centerfield combined to swipe 89 bases. The offense was third in the AL in runs scored.

Oakland straggled out of the gate and were 10-11 when they delivered a sweep of AL West division rival Minnesota and took two of three from another challenger in Kansas City. By Memorial Day, the A's record was a pedestrian 24-20, but that was enough to be on top of a balanced AL West.

They gradually picked up steam in the early part of the summer. There was a four-game sweep of the California Angels in June. Right before the All-Star break, the A's played AL East teams in New York, Baltimore and Cleveland, the first two being leading contenders. Oakland went 7-4 in this stretch and took a five-game lead into the break.

Chicago, Texas and Kansas City were the teams hoping to make a second-half run. The A's played steady baseball immediately out of the break and pushed their lead as high as 7 ½ games. That's where it stood on Labor Day. The White Sox had fallen by the wayside, with the Rangers and Royals still holding out hope for a September challenge.

Oakland had the opportunity to put Texas away in a four-game series in early September. Catfish got them rolling with a 3-0 win to start the series, but the A's lost the next three. The margin was still comfortable at 5 ½ games with three weeks to play, but it wasn't over yet. They



went to Texas for a return trip and lost the first two of a weekend series. The Rangers had the chance to close within three games in the Sunday finale.

The championship veterans answered the bell. Bando hit a two-run homer and Fingers gave 4 2/3 innings of quality relief work in a 4-1 win. That effectively ended the hopes of the challengers. With six days to go in the season, Hunter beat the Twins 2-1 to secure at least a tie. One day later, Texas blew an extra-inning lead in Kansas City and lost 5-4, ending the race.

## 1974 ALCS

The 1974 American League Championship Series marked the third time in four years the Oakland A's and Baltimore Orioles had squared off for the pennant. Both teams had excellent pitching throughout this era, and that would define this series.

So, on a Saturday afternoon, we got started with the A's sending Catfish to the mound to face off with crafty Oriole lefty Mike Cuellar. With one out in the first inning, Baltimore's Paul Blair took Catfish deep and the Birds had a quick 1-0 lead.

Oakland evened it up in the bottom of the third. Green worked a leadoff walk. North grounded into a force play but replacing Green with the speedy North on the bases worked out. North stole second and then scored on a base hit from Campaneris.

The Orioles moved back in front in the fourth when Bobby Grich hit a one-out double, and then scored on a single by Tommy Davis. And in the fifth, Baltimore opened up against Catfish. The legendary Brooks Robinson was in the twilight of his career, but he homered to lead off this inning. Elrod Hendricks singled, then moved up to second on a sac bunt and took third on a passed ball. When Hunter struck out Rich Coggins, he was on the verge of limiting the damage. But Blair came up with a clutch RBI single to make it 4-1. Grich homered. It was 6-1, Hunter was gone, and Baltimore was cruising.

Oakland got a run back in the fifth but didn't threaten again until adding another run in the ninth. The outcome wasn't in doubt after the Grich blast, and the Orioles took the opener 6-3.

Now, the two-time defending champs faced a virtual must-win game on Sunday afternoon, lest they go on the road down 0-2. Holtzman shouldered the burden for the A's against Dave McNally for the Birds.

Both pitchers were sharp early, and the game was scoreless into the bottom of the fourth. Bando hit a harmless pop fly down the rightfield line, in foul territory. Grich gave chase and got there...but he dropped the ball. That was the opening Bando needed, who homered to give Oakland their first lead of the series.

The A's were able to get another run when North drew a walk, and then scored on a two-out triple from Rudi. Oakland threatened in the seventh, loading the bases with two outs. Nothing came of it, and this remained a tight 2-0 game into the late innings. Finally, in the eighth, the A's broke it open. With two outs, a walk and an error, set up a three-run homer by Ray Fosse. Holtzman completed a five-hitter. Oakland's 5-0 win evened the series.

LCS games still weren't being scheduled for prime-time, so the Tuesday through Thursday schedule in Baltimore to decide the pennant would all take place during work or school hours. Tuesday's Game 3 saw Blue go for the A's, while the Orioles gave the ball to Jim Palmer. And a series that had already seen some good pitching was about to go to a whole new level.

Blue and Palmer simply dominated. The difference? Palmer made one mistake to Bando, who hit another big home run. On an afternoon when he pitched a four-hitter, Palmer would take the L. Blue was magnificent, dealing a two-hitter, striking out seven and never allowing anything resembling a real threat. The A's 1-0 win moved them to the brink of the pennant.

Game 4 was a Hunter-Cuellar rematch. The A's weren't much better at hitting Cuellar than they had been in Game 1. But on this afternoon, the Oriole lefty was wild.

The problems started in the first inning, when Cuellar issued three consecutive two-out walks. He got Gene Tenace to pop up and avoid damage. But his control never settled in, and in the fifth inning, it came back to bite. Again with two outs, Cuellar walked two men. Then a wild pitch put runners on second and third. Rudi was intentionally walked. Normally, this would seem a smart move. But loading the bases when the starting pitcher is having trouble finding the strike zone is problematic. Cuellar walked Tenace. The A's had a 1-0 lead.

As the game moved to the sixth inning, Oakland was in the bizarre position to win a pennant-clinching game while being no-hit. Finally, in the seventh, the bats got off the schneid. After a walk to Bando, Reggie Jackson doubled. The only A's hit of the afternoon had given them a 2-0 lead.

Hunter dominated through seven innings and that 2-0 lead held to the ninth inning. Rollie was on the mound looking to close it out, when Baltimore launched a last, desperate rally. With one out, Blair walked and Grich singled. After Davis grounded out, a Boog Powell base hit made it 2-1 and there were runners on first and second. Don Baylor was the last hope. Fingers struck him out and Oakland had won the game on the strength of pitching and drawing 11 walks.

There weren't a lot of notable offensive performers in this series. In fact, there were none for Baltimore. For Oakland, a hat tip would have to go to Fosse, who went 4-for-12. And while Bando only went 3-for-13, his two home runs were both huge.

My retroactive choice for ALCS MVP would be Blue. While I generally prefer a starting pitcher to have two wins before considering them for a series MVP award, Blue's dominance in Game 3 was both thorough and necessary, given Palmer's almost-as-good performance.

## **1974 WORLD SERIES**

The Oakland A's came to the 1974 World Series looking for a third straight championship. The Los Angeles Dodgers were in the Fall Classic for the first time in nine years. In one sense, it was a close Series—each game was tightly contested. But in the bigger sense, it was decisive—the veteran A's were the team that consistently came up with the clutch plays.

The Series began on Saturday afternoon in Dodger Stadium. The A's went with Holtzman against the Dodgers' 20-game winner, Andy Messersmith. Oakland struck first in the top of the second when Reggie homered to left-center. Los Angeles responded by putting two men aboard in the bottom half of the inning, but Ron Cey grounded into a double play.

That missed opportunity set a tone. The Dodgers put two runners on in both the third and fourth innings and failed to score. In the top of the fifth, Holtzman went to work with his bat, doubling down the leftfield line, going to third on a wild pitch and scoring on a squeeze bunt by Campaneris. L.A. might have been making most of the noise, but it was Oakland that took a 2-0 lead into the bottom of the fifth.

The Dodgers got some help from the A's defense. Davey Lopes reached on an error by Campaneris. A subsequent error by Reggie, on a single off the bat of Bill Buckner, allowed the speedy Lopes to come all the way around. Jimmy Wynn drew a walk. It was 2-1, there were runners on first and second and still just one out. Alvin Dark had seen enough and went to Rollie,

Fingers struck out Steve Garvey and ultimately killed the threat. The Dodgers might have gotten on the board, but they had let another chance get away. And they made their own defensive miscues in the top of the eighth. Campaneris beat out a bunt. Then Cey committed an error that allowed Campy to come all the way around. In the meantime, Fingers was dealing. Not until there were two outs in the ninth, when Wynn hit a solo blast, did the Dodgers do anything offensively. The final was 3-2.

Don Sutton and Blue had both been dominating in their LCS starts, and they were the pitching matchup for Sunday's Game 2. This was an era when baseball was still more popular than the NFL, so even though the Oakland Raiders and Los Angeles Rams were each bound for their respective conference championship games in 1974, the World Series was the biggest show in town.

The Dodgers got on the board in the second inning when Cey worked a one-out walk. Subsequent singles by Bill Russell and Steve Yeager brought him around. Blue got settled in

and L.A. stayed quiet until the sixth. That's when Garvey's infield hit was followed by a Joe Ferguson home run. It was 3-0.

In the meantime, Sutton was dominating. Not until the eighth, when two singles and an error loaded the bases with one out, did the A's launch a meaningful threat. Sutton got Billy North to hit on the ground to Russell at short, who took it himself at second, threw to first for the double play and killed the threat.

Oakland threatened again in the ninth. Bando was hit by a pitch and Reggie doubled to put runners on second and third with no outs. The veteran Dodger manager Walter Alston called on his Cy Young Award-winning reliever, Mike Marshall. Rudi greeted Marshall with a line drive single to center that cut the lead to 3-2.

Marshall struck out Tenace. At that point, Herb Washington came out of the A's dugout to pinch run at first base. Washington was a track star and was employed specifically for these situations—to steal a base and get into scoring position. Marshall picked him off and closed it out. Another 3-2 final was in the books, this one going to the Dodgers.

After a day off, the Series resumed back in Oakland on Tuesday night. Catfish was going for Oakland, while Al Downing took the ball for Los Angeles.

The first movement took place in the bottom of the third. With one out, North singled to left. That was followed by a ground ball out, but alert baserunning got North all the way to third. That extra base was significant. After Bando drew a walk, North was in position to score on an error made by catcher Ferguson on a ball in front of the plate. Rudi followed with a single that scored Bando and it was 2-0.

L.A. put two runners on in the fourth with one out, but Willie Crawford's line drive to second baseman Dick Green ended up as a double play. Oakland added on in the bottom of that same inning. Green walked, Catfish bunted him up and Campaneris delivered a two-out single that made it 3-zip.

Hunter cruised through seven innings. In the eighth, Buckner went deep to get the Dodgers on the board and brought on Fingers. Wynn drew a one-out walk. Garvey came up and hit a line drive. Once again, it was bad luck for Los Angeles—it went to Green and ended up as a double play.

A home run by Crawford in the ninth cut the lead to 3-2 and a Campaneris error put the tying run aboard with none out. Fingers struck out Cey, got a double-play ball from Russell and put another 3-2 final to bed.

Game 4 was a Holtzman-Messersmith rematch, and it was mostly quiet in the early innings. Until Holtzman again did damage with his bat—a third-inning solo blast gave Oakland a 1-0

lead. L.A. had an immediate response in the top of the fourth. With one out, Garvey singled. Ferguson drew a two-out walk. Russell smacked a triple to center that scored both runs and gave the Dodgers a 2-1 lead.

Holtzman had another opportunity at the plate in the fifth, with runners on second and third and one out. This time, Messersmith struck him out and preserved the lead. In the top of the sixth, Wynn's leadoff double gave Los Angeles a chance to add on. But Holtzman pitched around trouble. That set up the decisive home half of the sixth inning.

North led off with a walk and moved up to second when a pickoff throw went awry. Bando singled, and we were tied 2-2. After Messersmith walked Reggie, Rudi got a bunt down and put runners on second and third. Claudell Washington was intentionally walked to load the bases with one out.

Jim Holt came off the Oakland bench to pinch-hit for catcher Ray Fosse and delivered—a two-run single to rightfield put the A's up 4-2 and there were still runners on the corners. Green's groundball out picked up another run.

It was 5-2, and not until the eighth did Los Angeles threaten. They put two runners on with two outs. The tying run at the plate brought Fingers in for Holtzman. The great closer struck out Ferguson, closed the ninth without further incident and put Oakland on the brink of another championship.

The Dodgers would invest their last hopes in Sutton, who had been brilliant in all three of his postseason starts. He would rematch with Blue in Game 5.

Oakland had momentum, and they applied early pressure. Campaneris led off the bottom of the first with a single. North replaced him on the basepaths after a force out. North then stole second and took third on Yeager's throwing error. That allowed Bando's fly ball to score a run and give the A's a 1-0 lead. In the second inning, Fosse homered to make it 2-0.

Sutton settled down, Blue cruised in the early going and it was still 2-zip in the top of the sixth. With matters getting urgent for the Dodgers, Tom Paciorek led off the inning with a double. Lopes drew a walk and Buckner's sac bunt moved the tying runs into scoring position. Wynn's fly ball scored one run. Garvey came up with a clutch two-out single to left that tied the game 2-2.

By the seventh inning, it was a battle of the great closers, Fingers and Marshall. In the bottom of that inning, Rudi homered. It was 3-2 and the A's had just six outs left to get.

In the top of the eighth, Buckner singled to center. An error by North gave Buckner second base, and he decided to try for third. Reggie was backing up the play and threw out Buckner.

The last, best Dodger chance was gone. Fingers closed it out. When Von Joshua hit a comebacker to the mound, the Oakland A's were champions again.

Fingers was named the 1974 World Series MVP. He had appeared in four games, pitched 9 1/3 innings, allowed only two runs and picked up a win and two saves. He was an understandable choice. But Rudi had a case of his own—he was 6-for-18, with several clutch hits, including the home run that won the championship. I can see a really good argument both ways, but I think I'd lean to Rudi.

Campaneris had a notable series, going 6-for-17. On the Dodger side, Garvey was the only hitter who was consistent, collecting eight hits over the five games. Marshall appeared in all five games out of the bullpen and pitched nine innings. The fatal pitch to Rudi in the seventh inning of Game 5 was his only mistake.

As for Oakland, the 1972-74 stretch of dominance represents the only time in baseball history a team not named the New York Yankees has won three consecutive World Series titles.

## 1975

A crack in the dynasty—a big one—took place in the offseason between 1974 and 1975. Catfish filed a lawsuit against Finley regarding the failure to pay into a contractually promised annuity fund. Catfish won his case, his contract was voided, and he became a free agent. He signed with the New York Yankees.

The everyday lineup was still intact, and the '75 A's finished second in the American League for runs scored. Rudi hit 21 home runs, and the A's had quality vets on the left side of the infield in Bando and Campaneris. There was speed in the outfield, with 20-year-old Claudell Washington hitting .308 and North posting a .373 OBP.

All of these players were solid contributors but in the pantheon of the Oakland A's in the early 1970s, no star shone brighter than that of Reggie. The rightfielder had another big year in 1975, with 36 home runs and 104 RBIs.

The depth of the pitching staff was tested, but the arms also finished second in the A for staff ERA. Blue won 22 games with a 3.01 ERA and Holtzman won 18 and had a 3.14 ERA. Rollie did whatever Oakland needed—he pitched 126 innings, won 10 games, saved 24 more and had a 2.98 ERA.

Blue, Holtzman and Fingers shouldered the load in Catfish's absence, and made sure the A's had the pitching to stay ahead of a talented and rising young Kansas City Royals team in the AL West.

Oakland played well early and was 29-20, though Kansas City was a half-game better on June 3, as the teams were the best two in the American League. The A's then won 13 of 17 and a four-game series with the Royals during that stretch would be a turning point.

The teams split the first two of a four-game weekend set and were wrapping it up with a Sunday doubleheader. Oakland led 5-2 in the ninth inning, when a series of relievers—including Fingers—were unable to hold the lead and the Royals scored three times to tie it.

Kansas City then got an RBI single from young third baseman George Brett in the top of the 12<sup>th</sup> and was all set to get what, for a young team, would be an enormous win on the road. Or at least as enormous as any win can be in June.

But the A's showed veteran savvy. Tenace drew a walk. Jackson singled, but the A's also got down to their final out. Bando then hit a double that brought in both runs and won the game 7-6. Oakland took the nightcap of the doubleheader 8-1. By the end of June they were eight games up, the Royals never got closer than 4 ½ and Oakland finished 98-64, seven games ahead at season's end.

When a team wins a race by seven games, it's difficult to say that one more out in a June doubleheader was the reason. But it was the turning point, the clear dividing line between when Kansas City had hope and when Oakland took over the race. And the game symbolically illustrates one young team that wasn't quite ready and one group of proud veterans that weren't yet ready to let go of their crown.

## 1975 ALCS

The Boston Red Sox had surprised observers by ousting Baltimore from the throne room in the AL East, and easily outpacing New York.

The ALCS opened in Fenway Park on the first Saturday of October. The Red Sox sent veteran Cuban righthander Luis Tiant to the mound, while the A's countered with Holtzman. Tiant was Boston's most clutch pitcher and Holtzman had his own demonstrated record of big-game performance. Each were dialed in for Game 1 and an unearned run for the Red Sox in the second inning was the only score as the game went into the seventh.

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

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

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

Bando doubled with two outs, and then Reggie homered to give the A's a quick 2-0 lead in the first inning. The A's added another run in the fourth on consecutive doubles from Rudi and Claudell Washington.

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

Oakland still had the best reliever in the game. Rollie came in after Cecil Cooper hit a leadoff double, and escaped the jam, with help from Reggie, who gunned Cooper at the plate when he attempted to score on a sac fly.

The Red Sox were able to chip away at Fingers though. Yastrzemski doubled with one out in the sixth and scored the lead run on a base hit by Fisk. Petrocelli, not known for his power, homered in the seventh. And in the eighth, Beniquez singled, was bunted over, and scored on a single by Lynn.

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

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

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

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

With two outs in the top of the fourth, the A's defense again helped the Red Sox. Washington, a 20-year-old leftfielder, committed a two-base error off the bat of Lynn and Petrocelli picked up



the RBI single. In the top of the fifth, after a double by Burleson, Boston got another big two-out RBI single, this one from Doyle.

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

Oakland got a run back in the bottom of the sixth, but Boston starter, 18-game winner Rick Wise, struck out Jackson with a man aboard to keep it a 4-1 game. The Red Sox added another two-out RBI single, this one from Cooper in the eighth, to make it 5-1.

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

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

Drago came on, and induced Rudi to hit a ground ball to short, where Burleson started a 6-4-3 double play. All of New England could exhale and Drago closed the door in the ninth. Boston was going back to the World Series.

Had an ALCS MVP existed there is no doubt that it would have been Yastrzemski, with his .455 batting average over three games. Yaz was now 35-years-old and his push to be a part of the first Boston team to win a World Series since 1918 was a great story in of itself and that would have undoubtedly driven media voting.

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

Baseball fans would not get to see the Oakland A's dynasty take on the Big Red Machine in the World Series, but the coming seven-game battle the Red Sox would stage with the Cincinnati Reds more than made up for it.

As for Oakland though, this crashing end to the 1975 season was also the end of the dynasty.

## EPILOGUE

Free agency was just becoming a thing as we moved to the latter half of the 1970s. This would take its toll on the small market teams that dominated the early part of the 1970s, but nowhere was the impact more dramatic than in Oakland. The players loathed Finley for what they saw as his cheapskate meddling and they took the opportunity to get out of town.

Reggie departed after the 1975 season. Knowing he was soon to be gone, Finley traded him, along with Holtzman, to Baltimore, where Jackson spent a year before going to New York as a free agent. Oakland still had enough talent on hand to contend in 1976, but they ran second to Kansas City in the AL West.

Then the dam broke. Rollie went to San Diego, Rudi to California, and Bando to Milwaukee. The A's collapsed. Blue departed for San Francisco a year later. In short order, the A's were a shell of what they had been.

But in a decade that had several memorable teams—the Big Red Machine, Earl Weaver's Orioles, Willie Stargell's Pirates, the late 1970s versions of the Yankees, Dodgers, Royals and Phillies—no one collected more rings than the Oakland A's.