



## INTRODUCTION

The great baseball town of Cincinnati had waited a long time for a winner. The Reds had not won the World Series since 1940. They ended two decades of mostly losing baseball with a pennant in 1961. But despite fielding mostly winning teams the rest of the 1960s, they had not returned to the Fall Classic. The franchise wanted more. And throughout the 1970s, they got it.

Cincinnati became known as The Big Red Machine and the names live in baseball lore. Johnny Bench. Pete Rose. Joe Morgan. Tony Perez. George Foster. Ken Griffey Sr. And more. The Reds tapped a then-unknown minor league manager Sparky Anderson to lead this burgeoning collection of talent.

1970 through 1976 were the halcyon years of the Big Red Machine. Over that seven-year span, they won five division titles and four National League pennants. That period culminated with back-to-back World Series titles in 1975-76. That includes winning one all-time classic World Series in '75, and then sweeping through the entire postseason a year later.

The Big Red Machine slowly started to break up after that, but they remained competitive. From 1977-81, they continued to be a contender. Another division title came in 1979. In 1981, the strange nature of a midseason strike and subsequent split-season format meant that the Reds could finish with the best cumulative record in baseball...and somehow not make the playoffs.

After 1981, the last vestiges of the old Machine were grown, and Cincinnati launched a painful rebuilding project. It wasn't until the latter part of the decade—after Rose had returned as a manager—that the Reds became relevant again.

Each Cincinnati season from 1970 through 1981 has its own year-long summary on TheSportsNotebook.com. Each playoff series has a complete game-by-game recap. This compilation pulls all of those articles together, edits them for redundancy, and presents a cohesive top-level narrative of the Big Red Machine era.

It's worth reminding younger readers that baseball had a very different landscape than is the case today. The NL Central that today's Cincinnati teams compete in was non-existent. Each league had just two divisions—an East and a West. The Reds were positioned in the NL West.

As you might expect, the Los Angeles Dodgers were consistently their top rival. The San Francisco Giants and San Diego Padres were also in this division. The Houston Astros, their move to the American League well into the future, were a key NL West rival in the latter years of the Big Red Machine. The Atlanta Braves filled out what was then a six-team division. As to why the Reds and Braves were in the West, while the Chicago Cubs and St. Louis Cardinals were in the East, is a question that no doubt troubled geography teachers across the country.

Furthermore, only the first-place team could qualify for postseason play. There was no wild-card fallback and winning the division meant you went directly to the League Championship Series. In postseason play itself, homefield advantage was done on a rotation system, rather than won-loss record. The American and National League simply took turns. That's why a 108-win Reds team in 1975 was playing on the road in the decisive moments of the World Series. The LCS round was a best-of-five, and used a 2-3 scheduling format. The East and West winners again took turns opening at home.

It was a different era of baseball and The Big Red Machine was a central part of it. Enjoy this 12-year ride, from its early successes and frustration, to the peak of the dynasty, to the gradual descent.

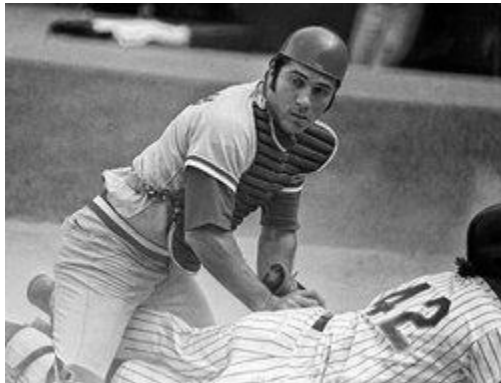
## 1970

The Big Red Machine would become renowned more for their bats than for their pitching. And the regular lineup was awfully good in 1970, ranking third in the National League for runs scored. But the pitching was even better, with the second-best staff ERA in the 12-team NL

Gary Nolan was the ace, winning 18 games with a 3.27 ERA. Jim McGlothlin and Wayne Simpson won 14 games apiece with an ERA in the 3s. And lefty Jim Merritt was the biggest beneficiary of the bats—a 20-game winner in 1970 even with an ERA of 4.08. Tony Cloninger's 3.83 ERA came in a mix of both starting and relieving.

Anderson would become renowned for his adroit use of the bullpen in an era of baseball that was quite different from our own. Starters were expected to go the distance. But Sparky, who would eventually be nicknamed "Captain Hook" for his propensity to use the pen, got the most out of his relievers.

Wayne Granger saved 35 games and finished with an ERA of 2.66. Clay Clarroll worked over 100 innings, saved 16 more and posted a 2.59 ERA. Don Gullett, a 19-year-old rookie, who would soon become a top starter, broke in with 77 innings of relief work and a 2.43 ERA.



Bench was entering his prime and he had his best season in 1970. His 45 home runs and 148 RBIs led the league and he won the MVP award.

Cincinnati's corner infielders were prolific in their own right. Lee May played first base and hit 34 homers with 94 RBI. Perez would eventually shift to first base later in the decade, but for now he was playing third base. And racking up a 40 HR/129 RBI campaign in the process.

A power trio of Bench, May and Perez makes for a scary lineup on its own, but there was more. Bernie Carbo, the 22-year-old outfielder, hit 21 homers and finished with a dazzling .454 on-base percentage.

You still needed someone to set the table for all those who could clean it up. Bobby Tolan, the speedy centerfielder finished with a stat line of .384 OBP/.475 slugging percentage and stole 57 bases. Rose was in left field and his final stat line read .385/.470.

It was the Braves who captured the first iteration of the NL West in 1969. The Dodgers were a perennial contender. And the April schedule gave the Reds a steady diet of these two key rivals.

After beating the Montreal Expos on Opening Day, Cincinnati promptly went west for a three-game series in L.A. Nolan threw a two-hitter on Tuesday night and beat the Dodgers 4-0. McGlothlin pitched well on Wednesday night, working into the eighth inning. Tolan provided him with the needed offensive spark. The centerfielder went 2-for-4, scored twice and drove in two runs. The Reds won 5-2.

Thursday night's finale was a pitcher's duel with Simpson going toe-to-toe with future Hall of Famer Don Sutton. Bench finally broke up a scoreless tie with a seventh-inning home run. Bench was later part of an insurance rally in the ninth, capped when shortstop Dave Concepcion hit a two-out/two-run double to secure the 3-0 win and series sweep.

The Dodgers made a return trip to old Crosley Field for two games in mid-April. It was Merritt's turn to showcase some stellar pitching, working into the ninth inning and winning 3-2 behind two hits from second baseman Tommy Helms and a big two-RBI single from Tolan. The following night, the Reds' offense decided it had enough of playing around with close games. May unloaded for four hits, including a grand slam in a 12-0 rout. Cincinnati had gone 5-for-5 in its early games with L.A.

A trip to Atlanta was soon after, on April 20. Bench and Perez each homered in Monday night's opener, as did a young fourth outfielder named Hal McRae. Merritt went the distance for the 6-2 win. Cincy pitching finally showed some cracks the next night, giving up eight runs. No problem. Rose had three hits, Perez had four hits and homered. Bench homered. Carbo homered twice. The Reds won 13-8.

By the time Memorial Day arrived, Cincinnati was positively sizzling at 31-12, up 6 ½ games on Los Angeles and a clean seven on Atlanta.

June was a time of great excitement for the entire city. Not only were the Reds riding high, they were opening a new stadium. Crosley Field traced its origins back to 1912, the same year Fenway Park opened in Boston. In the summer of 1970, Crosley would give way to Riverfront Stadium.

The Reds won the final game played at Crosley, on June 24. They beat the Giants 5-4, thanks to back-to-back eighth inning home runs from Bench and May, off a future Hall of Fame pitcher in Juan Marichal. It was part of a lot of winning Cincinnati did in June, a month they went 20-8.

One of the losses came in Riverfront's debut and it came against Atlanta, 8-2 on June 30. The Reds responded by scoring nine runs the next night and winning in a rout. Merritt won the series rubber match 2-1. Overall, the Reds won four of the seven early summer games they played against the Braves and Dodgers. And by the All-Star break, their NL West lead was up to nine games on L.A., with Atlanta well into the rearview mirror at 16 games back.

Taking three of four from the Braves right out of the break was a surefire way to put a foot on the necks of the defending division champs. Cincinnati was up and down in the month of August, but still split four games and extended their lead to a hefty 13 games over the Dodgers by Labor Day.

September was a time to cruise home and get ready for the playoffs. The only downside was that the Reds didn't get to experience an on-field celebration—the NL West was clinched with two weeks to go when the Dodgers lost while Cincinnati was on an off-day. But that's about the only thing that didn't go right for the Reds in the 1970 National League season. They finished the year 102-60, 14 ½ games clear of the field in the NL West and easily the best record in the senior circuit as a whole.

## 1970 NLCS

This NLCS would open with two games in Pittsburgh, with the balance of the series to be played in Cincinnati. It was the postseason debut for a couple of new ballparks. Three Rivers Stadium and Riverfront Stadium were seeing the first of what would be plenty of playoff and World Series baseball in the years ahead.

The Reds mounted early threats in Saturday afternoon's Game 1. Cincy put two on with two out and both the first and second inning. Each time, Pirate starter Dock Ellis got the key out that kept the Reds off the board.

Pittsburgh had their own missed chance in the third. Gene Alley was on first base with two outs, and was unable to score on a double. With runners on second and third, Nolan killed the threat. The Pirates missed another two-on/two-out chance in the bottom of the fourth

The scoreless tie went to the sixth inning when Perez ripped a double into the leftfield gap to start the frame. Bench's fly ball moved Perez to third. May had the chance to break the scoring drought...but he grounded out to third. Ellis escaped and yet another rally ended with nothing.

It was the Pirates' chance in the bottom of the eighth when Willie Stargell slashed a one-out double. Nolan responded with consecutive strikeouts. In the bottom of the ninth, Pittsburgh's Matty Alou beat out an infield hit with two outs. He made an understandable attempt to steal second. Bench threw him out. There had been plenty of action in this first game, but no runs as we went to extra innings .

Ty Cline batted in Nolan's spot and opened the top of the 10th with a triple. Pete Rose singled and we finally had someone on the board. With two outs, Bench was intentionally walked. The move didn't work. May doubled in both runs for some insurance. Carroll came on in relief of Nolan and closed the bottom of the 10th without incident. Cincinnati had a road win, 3-0.

The Pirates sent Luke Walker to the mound the following afternoon for Game 2. The Reds went to Merritt. And the top of the first in Game 2 went much the same as the opener. After Walker hurt his own cause with an error and then gave up a single, Cincy had two on with no one out. Bench's line drive went directly to Alley at shortstop, who promptly doubled off Rose. End of threat.

In the top of the third, Tolan began to put his imprint on the series. He singled to left, stole second and then took third on a throwing error. Moments later, Tolan scored on a wild pitch. Having shown his speed, Tolan demonstrated his power in the top of the fifth. A solo blast put the Reds up 2-0.

The fans of Pittsburgh had yet to see their team score a run through a game and a half when the Pirates came to bat in the top of the sixth. Second baseman Dave Cash doubled with one out, prompting Anderson to summon Carroll. It didn't stop the great Roberto Clemente, whose base hit finally put Pittsburgh on the board. Manny Sanguillen followed with another single. There were runners on first and second with one out in a 2-1 game. Carroll buckled down, got the two outs he needed and preserved the lead.

And that was the last time the Pirates made a real threat. Tolan got his team an insurance run in the eighth, singling and then scoring on a double by Perez. Both games had been tight and nerve-wracking. But 3-1 final meant the road team had taken both. Cincinnati was going home in complete command of this NLCS.

Night baseball had been in place since 1935, but it still was not used in postseason play. So Monday's Game 3 took place in the afternoon, right alongside the ALCS Game 3, where the Baltimore Orioles were also looking to close out a home sweep.

Their back to the wall, Pittsburgh got right after Cloninger. Freddie Patek worked a leadoff walk and moved up on a groundball out. Patek tried to force the action and was thrown out stealing third. Which was unfortunate, because behind him, Clemente singled, Stargell walked and Al Oliver singled.

The Pirates led 1-0, but it could have been more. Stealing third with those bats coming up smells of desperation. Which Pittsburgh's offense could hardly be blamed for after the first two games, but was costly nonetheless. It got even more costly when Perez and Bench hit back-to-back homers in the bottom of the inning to put the Reds up 2-1.

Cloninger walked two men to start the top of the second. Moose dropped a sacrifice bunt, which only partially worked. He got the runner to third, but the Reds picked up the force at second. The double play was still in order and that proved decisive. Patek's rough start to Game 3 continued when he grounded into a 5-4-3 twin killing.



Moose was settled, but his lineup missed a chance in the fourth when Richie Hebner doubled with one out in the fourth, but was stranded. In the fifth, Alou hit a one-out single and was on second with two outs. Stargell's single to right finally tied the game 2-2. In the top of the sixth, Hebner hit another double, this time to start the inning. Bill Mazeroski's bunt attempt failed and the Reds got the out at third and then killed the threat.

It was another tense pitcher's duel as we reached the bottom of the eighth. Moose got the first two outs, but then walked Cline and allowed a single to Rose. Joe Gibbons came on in relief. Tolan was at the plate. He singled to left, the Reds were up 3-2 and were on the threshold of a pennant.

Granger was on in relief. After getting the first two outs, he couldn't get Clemente, who singled to right and kept the series alive. Anderson called on young Don Gullett. Stargell singled to right. There were runners on the corners. But it wouldn't be the 1970 NLCS if the pitcher didn't get the key out in a tight spot. Gullett induced Oliver to ground out to second. And, as a beloved Cincinnati Reds radio announcer might say, this National League pennant belonged to the Reds.

There was no MVP for NLCS play given until 1978. If we can double back and hand one out retroactively, it would have to be Tolan. He had gone 5-for-12 with a home run in a series where few hitters did anything. He had driven in the winning run of the series opener. Kudos also have to go to Perez, who collected four hits in the three games. On the Pittsburgh side, only Stargell's 6-for-12 performance stood out among players who played the entire series. Hebner acquitted himself in his two starts, going 4-for-6.

A postseason rivalry had started at the 1970 NLCS.

## **1970 WORLD SERIES**

The Orioles and Reds were far and away the best teams in baseball when they met at the 1970 World Series. The Orioles had also won their division title in a landslide, and also swept through the LCS round. A great showdown was anticipated in the Fall Classic. What actually ensued was a great show—Baltimore third baseman Brooks Robinson dazzled with his glove and his bat to lead the Orioles to their second championship in five years.

The Series opened on a Saturday afternoon. Riverfront Stadium was hosting the first two games of the World Series in its first year of existence.

And the home team went right to work against Baltimore starter Jim Palmer. Tolan ripped a one-out double and then came around to score on a two-out hit from Bench. In the top of the third, Tolan walked and then scored when May homered. The Reds had an early 3-0 lead.

Nolan set down the first ten batters, but the Oriole bats awoke in the top of the fourth. All it took was an infield hit by Paul Blair. Brooks Robinson followed with a home run and Baltimore was back within 3-2. When Elrod Hendricks pulled a line drive homer to right an inning later, we had a 3-3 tie.

Brooks Robinson had already made a difference with his bat. In the bottom of the sixth, he started putting an imprint on this Series with his glove. May hit a ground ball down the left field line. In a play that can only be described as impossible, Robinson backhanded the ball at the deepest part of the infield, executed a turnaround and threw out May while falling into foul territory.

The defensive heroics meant that the Reds did not score in an inning where they otherwise put a couple runners on. But the 3-3 tie didn't last long. Robinson came to the plate in the top of the seventh and homered again. The Oriole lead held into the ninth. Palmer got the first two outs. After he walked Rose, Baltimore manager Earl Weaver summoned Pete Richert from the bullpen to face Tolan. The center fielder hit the ball hard again, but it was a line drive right at shortstop Mark Belanger. The Orioles had won it, 4-3.

Sunday afternoon's Game 2 started out much the same way as the opener. A Belanger error got the Reds started in the bottom of the first. Perez singled. With two outs, May continued his strong hitting and ripped a two-run double. He was able to take third on a throwing error and thus be in a position to score when Hal McRae beat out an infield hit.

For the second straight game, Cincinnati had a 3-0 lead and this one was extended to 4-0 with a Tolan homer in the bottom of the second. After a one-out walk to Bench, Baltimore manager Earl Weaver had seen enough. Earl gave 20-game winner Mike Cuellar the hook and went to Tom Phoebus out of the bullpen.

It was also time for Brooks Robinson to again step up. Brooks made a diving stop on a ground ball off the bat of May, and started a 5-4-3 double play. The Cincinnati lead was kept at 4-0.

In the top of the fourth, the Orioles started to chip away. Boog Powell homered to dead center to make it 4-1. In the bottom of that inning, the Reds wasted a leadoff double by McRae. We went to the fifth inning with Cincinnati still in control, but Baltimore very much in a game that might have been a blowout.

With one out in the top of the fifth, Chico Salmon batted in the pitcher's spot. He singled to center. Don Buford and Paul Blair followed with singles. The lead was down to 4-2 and the tying runs were aboard. It was Anderson's turn to go to the bullpen. Milt Wilcox came on. But Powell delivered again, this time with an RBI base hit. A long fly ball from Frank Robinson allowed runners to move up and get to second and third.



Brooks Robinson came to the plate. In a two-on/two-out spot, he singled to tie the game 4-4. Elrod Hendricks followed with another big hit, this one an opposite field double down the left line. Baltimore was up 6-4 and Wilcox was gone almost as quickly as he'd come in.

Cincinnati was far from done. Their bullpen got the Oriole bats quieted down and Bench's solo blast in the bottom of the sixth cut the lead to 6-5. In the top of the seventh, the Reds put two runners on with one out. But Tolan popped out and Perez grounded out.

That was the last threat of the game for either side. Baltimore's Dick Hall cleaned up the last two innings without incident. A Series where the Reds could easily have held serve at home instead saw them going to Baltimore in a 2-0 deficit.

Night games in the World Series were still a year away, so the midweek games in Baltimore that started on Tuesday were all afternoon affairs. The Reds, facing 24-game winner and Cy Young runner-up Dave McNally, again wasted little time in going to work. Rose and Tolan started Game 3 with singles. But McNally got Perez to hit a grounder to third, one that Brooks Robinson turned into a rally-killing double play.

In the bottom of the first, Brooks was no less adroit with his bat. With the bases loaded and two outs, he doubled to score two runs and give the Orioles an early lead.

Cincinnati got a run back in the top of the second, when Concepcion came up with a two-out RBI base hit of his own. But Baltimore power answered back. Frank Robinson homered in the third, Buford homered in the fourth and McNally had a 4-1 lead.

Brooks Robinson continued his amazing glove work in the sixth, robbing Bench of a hit. In the bottom of that same inning, Brooks continued his amazing batwork. He doubled to help set up a bases-loaded with two outs situation. McNally came to the plate. Facing Granger, McNally broke his own game wide open with a grand slam.

It was 8-1, and even though Cincy scored a couple empty runs late, McNally closed out the complete game with a 9-3 win. Baltimore was one win from a title.

Four-man rotations were the norm in 1970, so it was no act of heroism for Game 1's starting pitchers, Palmer and Nolan, to return on three days' rest for Game 4. Facing elimination and an embarrassing sweep, the Reds scored early. May led off the top of the second with a walk and would score on Concepcion's two-out triple. Brooks Robinson immediately answered with a solo home run in the second inning's bottom half.

Palmer's early struggles continued in the third. A walk to Tolan was followed by a single from Rose and Cincinnati had runners on the corners with none out. Palmer buckled down to strike out Perez and induce a popout from Bench. The Reds were staring at a disaster if they failed to score. Until May hustled out an infield single and put his team up 2-1.

Nolan couldn't hold down the fort though. Palmer singled to lead off the bottom of the third. After two outs, the inning looked ready to end. Powell worked a walk. Then the two Robinsons, Frank and Brooks, along with Hendricks, all singled. Nolan was gone and the Orioles were up 4-2. The only consolation for the Reds at this point was that Rose had thrown out Brooks at the plate to mitigate the damage.

In the top of the fifth, Rose did something with his bat. He homered to cut the lead to 4-3. In the bottom of the sixth, Rose tried to do something with his arm that went awry. With Brooks Robinson on first base, Hendricks singled. Rose tried to throw out Brooks at third, but a throwing error instead brought the run in .

That run looked like some big insurance when Baltimore reached the eighth inning with a 5-3 lead and six outs from starting a celebration. Palmer walked Perez. Bench singled. Eddie Watt was summoned from the Oriole bullpen to face May. The Reds' first baseman continued his big Series with a home run that halted the celebration plans. Cincinnati was ahead 6-5 and their own reliever, Clay Carroll, finished the job. Carroll got the final 11 outs and allowed just one hit. The Reds were still alive.

The momentum of late Game 4 rolled over to the start of Game 5 on Thursday. Rose doubled down the right field line with one out. With two outs, Bench picked up the RBI single. May and McRae hit back-to-back doubles. For the third time in this World Series, Cincinnati had a 3-0 lead early in the game. And now the prospects of getting this Series back to Riverfront Stadium and turning up the pressure on Baltimore was looking very realistic.

But Merritt, getting his first start of the Series, couldn't deliver a shutdown inning. Blair singled, Frank Robinson homered and the Orioles were back to within 3-2 by the end of the first.

Meanwhile, Baltimore starter Cuellar settled down, while their bats were just getting warmed up. The Birds put two on with two out in the bottom of the second. Sparky Anderson, feeling the urgency, went to Granger out of the pen. Belanger singled to tie the game, Blair singled for the lead and it was 4-3.

Powell led off the bottom of the third with a double. Merv Rettenmund drove in the run with a single and moved up to second on the throw home. Davey Johnson singled and now the Orioles led 6-3. Granger was pulled and Wilcox came on.

But it was already too late. From the second inning through the sixth, Cuellar threw no-hit ball and gave up just one walk. A Rettenmund homer extended the lead to 7-3 going into the seventh inning. Cincinnati finally got another rally started, with runners on first and second. But Cuellar got Carbo to ground into a double play. The Orioles added two more runs and pushed it out to 9-3.

Cuellar was still on the mound in the ninth. Pinch-hitter Pat Corrales was at the plate with two outs. This Series fittingly ended with a ground ball to Brooks Robinson. He got the out and the Baltimore triumph was complete.

Brooks' play in this World Series lives on in history, but the Orioles had plenty of heroes. Blair, not known for his hitting, went 9-for-19. Powell capped off his MVP season by driving in five runs. On the losing side, Lee May's 7-for-18 hitting produced eight RBIs.

But there were two keys that determined the outcome. The hitters that would become known as the Big Red Machine—Rose, Bench and Perez—went a combined 10-for-57.

Of course the other key was Brooks Robinson himself. His defensive heroics had set the tone for this Series. He went 9-for-21 with two homers and six RBIs. He was an easy choice for 1970 World Series MVP.

The winner of Series MVP honors got a car. Rose, who co-owned a Cincinnati dealership with Bench, said afterwards "If we knew he wanted a car that badly, we would have given him one." Maybe that sentence best sums up Baltimore's victory in the 1970 World Series.

## 1971

Expectations in Cincinnati were soaring. But 1971 proved to be a year where nothing really clicked. The Reds did go wire-to-wire—but it was under .500 the entire way.

Bench was a microcosm of the team. Coming off an MVP year in 1970, Bench still hit 27 home runs, but his overall stat line was a meager .299 on-base percentage/.423 slugging percentage. Perez was similar at third base, hitting 25 homers, but the stat line a fairly pedestrian .323/.438.

There were non-productive offensive seasons from Tommy Helms at second base, Dave Concepcion at short and Bernie Carbo in leftfield. Rose played right field and hit .304—although for the man who would eventually become the sport's all-time hit leader, even that was off the normal pace.

The one man who didn't struggle in 1971 was May. The Reds' first baseman ripped 39 home runs, drove in 98 runs and finished with a stat line of .332/.508. But May's production wasn't enough to keep the Cincinnati lineup from slipping to ninth in the 12-team National League for runs scored.

The starting rotation was respectable. Gullett was the best of the group, winning 16 games and posting a 2.65 ERA. Nolan and McGlothlin had ERAs in the low 3s. Ross Grimsley won ten games with 3.57 ERA. Carroll was a good and versatile reliever, saving 15 games, winning 10 more, working over 90 innings and finishing with an ERA of 2.50.

But while all of those were good to decent seasons, none was a standout and the depth—save for Granger's 3.33 ERA in relief—was lacking. Cincinnati's staff ERA ended up seventh in the National League.

The Reds dropped the first four games in the season in an overall 4-8 start. They lost three of four at home to the Los Angeles Dodgers, who would contend to the final day. Cincinnati dropped two of three at home to San Francisco, the team who ultimately won the NL West. When the Reds made their return trip to the West Coast, they lost seven of nine against the Dodgers, Giants and the lowly San Diego Padres.

When Cincinnati was 20-28 by Memorial Day, while San Francisco was soaring at 36-14, the Reds were in serious trouble.

Cincinnati stabilized the ship a bit in June, going 16-15 (doubleheaders were more common in 1971, accounting for 31 games in a 30-day month). But the Reds gave back the progress by losing seven straight going into the All-Star break, including three straight at the eventual World Series champion Pittsburgh Pirates.

The record was 41-51. They were in fifth place and staring at a 15-game deficit. The only good thing that happened during the first half of the season was that the Reds swung a trade with the Giants, sending Frank Duffy and Vern Geishart to San Francisco in exchange for an outfielder named George Foster. The trade didn't make an immediate impact, but would eventually come to be seen for the mammoth steal that it was.

Cincinnati still had pride and they demonstrated it when the leading NL West contenders came to Riverfront Stadium for a stretch of games that began on July 15. San Francisco, still comfortably in the division lead, rolled into town for a three-game set.

Gullett started Thursday night's opener, worked into the eighth inning and the pitcher's duel was still tied 1-1 in the ninth. Perez won the ballgame with a two-out walkoff blast in the bottom of the ninth. When the Reds dropped a tough 4-3 decision on Friday night and then trailed 2-0 going into the ninth inning on Saturday, it looked like this would be just another tough series loss in a season full of them.

Then pinch-hitter Jimmy Stewart singled. Rose singled. Ty Cline put down a bunt intended to move the tying runs into scoring position. Instead, Cline beat it out and the bases were loaded. With nobody out, May worked a walk to cut the lead to 2-1. Perez delivered his second walkoff hit of the series, a two-run single that won it.

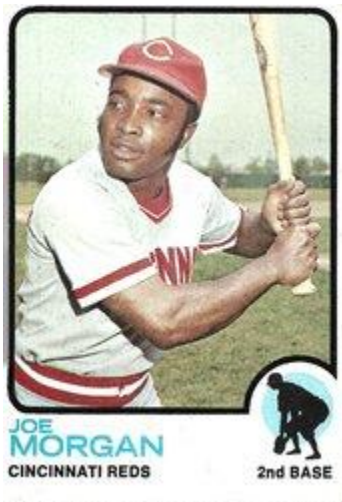
After splitting two games with the Padres on Sunday and Monday, the Dodgers came in on Tuesday night. Cincinnati broke open a 1-1 tie in the seventh with a five-run outburst, keyed by a three-run double from Helms. That momentum rolled right into Wednesday when the Reds scored six runs in the first three innings. That included a two-run single from Nolan, who went on to a complete-game 6-2 win. Even though the Reds dropped the finale and were nowhere near getting back in the race, the homestand proved to be a spark for the rest of the season.

Cincinnati went on to go 19-10 through the month of August, including taking three of four at home from the Pirates. The Reds got oh-so-close to the .500 mark at 66-67 on August 27 before losing a couple games. Going into the final weekend, Cincinnati was 79-80, but they dropped the final three games. The final record was 79-83.

San Francisco and Los Angeles went to the wire and Cincinnati was there to play spoiler in September. They won four of five against the Giants in September and took three of five from the Dodgers. It wasn't enough to matter in 1971. But it sent a message that the Reds were on the way back.

## 1972

After the disappointing '71 season, Cincinnati did anything but stand pat. They swung an eight-player trade with the Houston Astros. While the talent parted with was significant, including first baseman Lee May and second baseman Tommy Helms, the players acquired more than made up for it. Jack Billingham became a key part of the rotation. Cesar Geronimo proved to be a good outfielder. Ed Armbrister was valuable off the bench.



Oh, and one more player came back from Houston—a second baseman named Joe Morgan. In 1972, Morgan posted an on-base percentage of .417 and stole 58 bases.

Morgan's strengths—drawing walks and stealing bases—were, not coincidentally, two things the Reds led the National League in for 1972. And Morgan was joined by the holdovers who were building their own Hall of Fame credentials.

Johnny Bench was still just 24-years-old, and the great catcher hit 40 home runs and drove in 125 runs. For the second time in three years, Bench was named National League MVP.

Pete Rose was playing leftfield, and he put together another vintage season, with a .382 on-base percentage. Bobby Tolan played center and his 42 steals were another big part of Cincinnati's aggressive approach on the base paths. Tony Perez shifted to first base and hit 21 homers, while driving in 90 runs. All in all, this group ranked second in the National League for runs scored.

The pitching was pretty good in its own right. Gary Nolan won 15 games with a dazzling 1.99 ERA in just 25 starts. Ross Grimsley, 22-years-old, won 14 games with a 3.05 ERA. Billingham's 31 starts led the staff and his ERA was 3.18. Steady, if unspectacular work also came from Jim McGlothlin, Wayne Simpson, and young Don Gullett, who split time between the rotation and the bullpen.

Manager Sparky Anderson got good work from Tom Hall and Pedro Borbon, who each worked over 100 innings. And Clay Carroll was dynamite in a closer's role that wasn't yet as defined as it is today. Carroll saved 37 games with a 2.25 ERA. And the Reds composite staff ERA ranked third in the league.

The season started slowly—for Major League Baseball, which lost roughly two weeks due to a labor dispute—and for Cincinnati, who lost three of four games to the Dodgers and Astros at

home and started 2-5. A series win over the defending World Series champion Pittsburgh Pirates stabilized the ship, but the Reds did not clear the .500 mark until mid-May.

Fortunately for Cincinnati, no one else in the West had found their form. When Memorial Day arrived, the Reds' 20-18 record had them within four games of the front-running Astros. The Dodgers were in second. And after their terrific '71 season, the Giants would be a non-factor this time around.

Cincinnati went to Houston for a four-game series that started on Memorial Day, and it was here that the Reds decisively turned the corner. On Monday night, Tolán's three hits were the key to taking a 4-3 lead into the ninth, at which point Joe Hogue's three-run blast broke it open. The Reds won 8-3. On Tuesday night, Bench unloaded for a pair of homers, keying a 9-5 win.

The bats were cooking, and they didn't slow down. On Wednesday night, after spotting the Astros a 3-0 lead, Cincinnati got a grand slam from young George Foster. Bench ripped a three-run blast, and the final score was 12-4. Thursday's finale was more of the same. Houston took a 3-0 lead. Bench homered. Perez homered. Young Hal McRae hit a pinch-hit grand slam. The final was 10-3. The Reds had scored 39 runs in four games, were even with the Astros in the standings, and hot on the Dodgers' heels.

Out of this sweep, Cincinnati won 11 of the next 14 and moved into first place by a game and a half. Houston came north for the return trip and splitting the four games at Riverfront mildly stalled the momentum. But the Reds still had a half-game lead when they went to Los Angeles for a two-game set on June 26.



Nolan pitched Monday night's opener in Dodger Stadium and delivered a masterful complete-game shutout. Perez had three hits, drove in two runs and the Reds won 5-0. Tuesday night was going along similarly smoothly. Gullett was in command and handed a 5-1 lead over to the bullpen after seven. Things got interesting—L.A. scored three times and put the tying run on third. But Carroll came on, nailed down the final five outs and the Reds won 5-4.

From July 11, up until the All-Star break arrived on July 23, the Reds went 10-2. That included taking five of six from the Pirates, who were in the process of taking control of the NL East. Over that stretch, the Reds expanded their lead from a game and a half to a comfortable six-game margin.

The late summer saw Cincinnati put this race to bed. They ripped through August with a record of 21-9, including winning five games in six tries against a good New York Mets team. The Reds



won another series with the Dodgers. By Labor Day, Cincy was 80-47 and had an eight-game cushion on Houston.

That lead never shrunk under seven the rest of the way. On September 22, with a little less than two weeks to go on a Friday night, the Reds were back in Houston. A 4-3 win was secured when a groundball to shortstop Darrell Chaney resulted in a force out by Morgan at second base. The celebration could begin.

Cincinnati's final 95-59 record was the second-best in all of baseball, only a half-game of Pittsburgh's 96-59 mark. And since home field advantage in the playoffs was determined on a rotation basis, the difference didn't matter.

## 1972 NLCS

This year, the rotation called for the first two games to be played in Pittsburgh, with the final three in Cincinnati. So, it was old (then new) Three Rivers Stadium that hosted the series opener on a Saturday afternoon.

It didn't take long for the Reds to strike. Morgan homered off Steve Blass and gave Cincinnati a 1-0 lead in the top of the first. But Pittsburgh immediately answered against Gullett. Rennie Stennett led off the Pirate first inning with a single. Al Oliver followed with an RBI triple. After Roberto Clemente struck out, Willie Stargell doubled to give Pittsburgh the lead. And with two outs, Richie Hebner picked up Stargell with an RBI single.

With a 3-1 lead, Blass settled in. In the bottom of the fifth, the Pirates expanded their lead. Stennett again got it going, beating out an infield hit with two outs. Oliver homered. It was 5-1.

The Reds made a couple of threats to get back into the game. They had runners on the corners with one out in the sixth and put two on with two out in the seventh. Two runners reached with one out in the ninth. But the tying run never came to the plate, and Blass escaped all three jams without damage. The pitching hero of Pittsburgh's 1971 championship run, Blass went the distance for the 5-1 win.

In a best-of-five format, the loser of Game 1 faced immediate urgency and that's how the Reds came out in Game 2 against Bob Moose. Rose and Morgan opened the game with singles to right field. Tolan, Bench, and Perez ripped consecutive doubles. It was 4-0 before an out was recorded.

Bob Johnson came out of the Pittsburgh bullpen and kept it at 4-zip. The Pirates tried to respond right away by putting two on with one out. But Billingham got Stargell to ground into a double play and kill the threat.

Pittsburgh got on the board in the bottom of the fourth. Oliver hit a leadoff double and scored on a base hit from Milt May. Then, in the bottom of the fifth, Gene Alley was hit by a pitch. Bill Mazerowski, the franchise legend who had been the hero of the 1960 World Series, came off the bench to bat for Johnson, who had done yeoman's work in keeping the Pirates in the game. Mazerowski singled. The Pirates were in business, runners on first and second, no outs and a top of the order that had already been productive coming to the plate.

Billingham got Stennett to pop out, but Oliver legged out an infield hit to load the bases. Clemente hit a ground ball. The Reds got an out at second base, but didn't turn two, and a run scored. Tom Hall came out of the Cincy bullpen, a left-hander to face Stargell. Hall got the big strikeout and kept the Cincinnati lead at 4-2.

But the Pirates kept coming. Manny Sanguillen hit a one-double in the sixth and scored on a single from Dave Cash. It was 4-3.

That was all Pittsburgh could do against Hall, though. The reliever worked the balance of the game without allowing any more hits. Morgan homered in the eighth for an insurance run. The Reds won 5-3 and picked up the road split.

On Monday afternoon in Riverfront Stadium, the Reds gave the ball to Nolan. The Pirates went with Nelson Briles in the pivotal Game 3.

Cincinnati threatened in the first when Rose doubled to lead off. But Briles struck out Morgan, got Tolan and Bench and the game stayed scoreless.

In the third inning, though, the Reds got on the board. Darrell Chaney began the frame with a single to right, then moved up on a groundout by Rose. Morgan singled to right to score the game's first run, then stole second. Tolan singled to center, and it was 2-0 Cincinnati.

Clemente tried to rally Pittsburgh with a leadoff double in the fourth, but Nolan went through Stargell, Oliver, and Hebner and kept the Pirates off the board. The Reds missed their own opportunity in that inning's bottom half. Bench tripled to left to get it going. But Perez popped out. Cesar Geronimo flew out to left. Bench tried to tag up, but Stennett threw him out at the plate. After an action-packed fourth inning, it was still 2-0.

Sanguillen put Pittsburgh on the board with a solo blast in the fifth. The game stayed 2-1 into the seventh. Pedro Borbon was on in relief of Nolan. And the Cincy reliever plunked Hebner to start the inning. Sanguillen singled. Alley got a sacrifice bunt down to put runners on second and third with one out, and the lineup flipped over.

Stennett's single tied the game 2-2. Cash got a fly ball to right. Sanguillen tried to tag. And for the second time this afternoon, a catcher was thrown out at the plate. This time, it was Geronimo making the throw. We were still tied going into the eighth.

Clay Carroll came on. But Stargell worked a one-out walk and Oliver followed with a double. There were runners on second and third. Hebner was intentionally walked to put the double play in order. Facing Sanguillen, Carroll got the ground ball. But he didn't get the double play. The Reds got an out at second, but the Pirates got the go-ahead run.

Now trailing 3-2, the Reds got a one-out double from Rose. Pittsburgh turned to their own excellent closer, Dave Giusti. He got Morgan and Tolan to pop out, cleaned up the ninth without further incident and the Pirates had a 2-1 series lead.

Cincinnati was again facing urgency, and relying on the 22-year-old Grimsley to keep their season alive on Tuesday afternoon. Pittsburgh was hoping Dock Ellis could secure a return trip to the World Series.

Rose started the Reds' first inning with a base hit and was bunted up. But, trying to take third, on a Tolan groundball, Rose was cut down. At risk of seeing the inning get away, Bench singled to right. The great young catcher then stole second, and the errant throw from Sanguillen led to a run. Cincinnati was ahead 1-0.

Bench got another rally going in the bottom of the fourth, again with his legs. He led off with a single. With two outs, the inning was on the verge of dying. Bench again stole second. Geronimo hit a short pop fly into left that Alley made an error on. Bench scored and Geronimo ended up on third, where he scored on a bunt single from Chaney. It was a soft rally to be sure, but the Reds had some real breathing room with a 3-0 lead.

In the bottom of the sixth, Cincinnati struck again. Denis Menke doubled with one out and took third on a groundout. Chaney was intentionally walked to bring up Grimsley. The young pitcher was already in thorough command on the mound. Now, he delivered a dagger blow with his bat, a two-run double.

Grimsley went the distance with a two-hitter. Only one of those hits—a solo blast from Clemente in the seventh—left the infield. Cincinnati added two more runs. The only rout of this series went to the Reds, 7-1.

Everything was coming down to Wednesday afternoon's Game 5 and the Blass-Gullett rematch. After a scoreless first inning, Pittsburgh drew first blood in the top of the second. Sanguillen led off with a single and scored on a double by Hebner. Cash's RBI single staked Blass to a 2-0 lead. There were still none out, but facing the bottom of the order, Gullett stopped the damage there.

Cincinnati started to answer in the bottom of the third. Chaney hit a leadoff single. Gullett got a sac bunt down and set up Rose for the RBI double to cut the lead in half. But the Pirates immediately responded in the top of the fourth. Sanguillen, Hebner, and Cash hit consecutive singles. It was 3-1 and there were no outs.

With no margin for error left, Sparky went to Borbon. The reliever came up big. He got Alley, then induced a double-play ball from Blass. Pittsburgh had the lead at 3-1, but this could have been worse. While one can't be too hard on the Pirates, given that it was the bottom of the order, including the pitcher's spot, that left some meat on the bone early, there had been a missed chance to kill the Reds quickly.

Geronimo's solo homer in the fifth cut the lead to 3-2. Now, it was time for the long tension to settle in. Both pitchers were dealing. It was still 3-2 in the top of the eighth. Stennett, trying to help his team take out some insurance, hit a leadoff single. Oliver bunted him into scoring position. Clemente was intentionally walked.

Tom Hall again came out of the bullpen for the lefty-lefty matchup with Stargell. And again, the Reds reliever won the battle with a strikeout. Hall retired Sanguillen. The game stayed 3-2.

Joe Hague came off the Cincy bench to bat in the pitcher's spot in the bottom of the eighth and worked a leadoff walk. Rose got the sac bunt down. Ramon Hernandez was summoned from the Pirate bullpen. Hernandez came up big, getting Morgan on a grounder to second and striking out Tolan. Pittsburgh was three outs away.

Giusti came on in the bottom of the ninth. Bench greeted him with a home run. We were tied 3-3.

Then Perez singled to center. George Foster came on to pinch run and moved up to second on a base hit from Menke. Suddenly, the Reds went from the brink of elimination to having the winning run in scoring position with none out. Bob Moose came out of the Pittsburgh pen.

Geronimo flew out to right, but Foster tagged and took third. Then Moose got Chaney to pop up. Pittsburgh was on the verge of escaping. Hal McRae came off the Reds' bench to bat in Carroll's spot. The Pirates had their #2 starter on the mound in a game where both closers were gone. If they could survive this inning, the advantage would seem to be with Pittsburgh in extra innings.

A Moose curveball darted away from McRae. It also darted away from Sanguillen. Foster raced home and the Reds won the pennant.

Any list of the great NLCS battles ever played needs to include this 1972 edition. Cincinnati had played from behind the whole way—losing Game 1, losing Game 3, and trailing in the ninth inning of Game 5—before finally prevailing.

There was no LCS MVP award given out in this era. The best statistical performer in the series was Rose, who went 9-for-20. On the Pirate side, while no one batted .300 for the series, Oliver, Sanguillen, and Stennett all had their share of key hits and Blass had been exceptional in his two starts.

But if we can pick a 1972 NLCS MVP retroactively, my choice would be Bench. His overall numbers were good—6-for-18. He had gotten the Reds' going in the must-win Game 4, and his Game 5 home run started the winning rally.

## 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 1972 World Series was more of the same.

This year was the National League's turn to get homefield, so Cincinnati's Riverfront Stadium is where the Fall Classic began on a Saturday afternoon. Ken Holtzman was pitching for the A's, while Nolan got the call for the Reds.

George Hendrick was a young outfielder getting an opportunity for Oakland in this Series after the great Reggie Jackson had been injured in the ALCS. 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-zip lead.

Cincinnati put together a rally in their own half of the second, starting with singles from Bench and Perez. Denis Menke drew a walk and the bases were loaded with none out. Holtzman got Geronimo to pop out. 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. A's manager Dick Williams went to his great reliever, the future Hall of Famer Rollie Fingers, 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 Tenace 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 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 also had the great starter, Catfish Hunter, primed for Game 2. Cincinnati went with Grimsley. Both pitchers were dialed in on this Sunday afternoon.

The A's were able to touch Grimsley early, when Sal 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 Bert Campaneris resulted in Rose throwing out Green at the plate to keep the score 1-0.

Bench and Perez again were the igniters 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.

Joe 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. Blue Moon Odom, fresh off a terrific ALCS performance, 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 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.

## 1973



All components of The Big Red Machine were all humming in 1973. Rose had the best season of his should-be Hall of Fame career. Rose, playing left field, won the NL MVP award with a league-leading .338 batting average and a .401 on-base percentage.

Morgan had a stat line of .406 OBP/.493 slugging percentage, and he stole 67 bases to key the best running game in the National League. Bench slipped a bit from his MVP form the prior year, but the Hall of Fame catcher still hit 25 homers, drove in 104 runs, and won a Gold Glove behind the plate. Perez popped

27 home runs and racked up 101 RBIs at first base.

Other contributors included third baseman Denis Menke. Despite batting a meager .191, Menke epitomized patience at the plate and still had a solid .368 OBP. Concepcion was a steady glove and respectable bat at shortstop. Dan Driessen, at the age of 21, got playing time in both the outfield and at first base and hit .301. Driessen's production off the bench compensated for off-years from Geronimo and Tolan in the outfield. The Reds offense ended up second in the 12-team National League for runs scored.

The pitching was pretty good too, and the staff was led by Billingham. Making 40 starts, Billingham won 19 games and posted 3.04 ERA. Grimsley went to the post 36 times and finished with a 3.23 ERA. Gullett went 18-8 over his 30 starts with a 3.51 ERA.

These three starters formed the core. Sparky built his relief corps around a terrific year from Borbon, who posted a 2.16 ERA, along with respectable work from Carroll and Hall. The Cincinnati staff finished fourth in the league for composite ERA.

The Reds jumped out to a fast start and were 15-8 by the first weekend of May. But that was followed by a sluggish 12-game stretch where Cincinnati went 5-7 and lost a home series to the archrival Los Angeles Dodgers. When the race hit its first turn on Memorial Day weekend, the Reds were 25-19 and in fourth place. The San Francisco Giants were setting the pace, with the Dodgers and Houston Astros also in hot pursuit.

Cincinnati lost nine of fourteen games in early June, including five of six to mediocre St. Louis. They slipped 5 ½ back. The Pittsburgh Pirates were also mediocre this season, but the Pirates had also won three straight NL East titles. Beating Pittsburgh three of four seemed to get Cincy back on track...until the Pirates returned the favor.

Cincinnati didn't sit on their hands. They made a June trade to acquire starting pitcher Fred Norman. In his 24 starts as a Red, Norman won 12 games, finished with a 3.31 ERA and gave needed depth to the rotation. The Reds played better baseball going into the All-Star break, winning 15 of 20.

But the Dodgers were scorching hot—a 63-37 record at the break, comfortably the best in baseball. Even though Cincinnati's 57-42 mark was the second-best in the entire major leagues, they were still 5 ½ off the pace. Whether you loved it or hated it, this was baseball prior to 1993—two great teams preparing for a winner-take-all duel over the second half of the season.

The Reds turned up the heat in the later part of summer, ripping off 17 wins in 23 games out of the break, highlighted by scoring 22 runs in a three-game sweep of the Cardinals, followed by a series win on the road in Pittsburgh. By the time Labor Day arrived, Cincinnati had closed the margin on Los Angeles to a single game. They were still the two best teams in baseball and there were five head-to-head games in September.

But as often happens in a long pennant race, the biggest moments came just before the actual showdowns. In the week after Labor Day, the Reds and Dodgers both had games against the lower echelon of the NL West. Cincinnati went 5-2. Los Angeles went 1-6. By the time the Dodgers arrived at Riverfront Stadium for a two-game series on September 11 the Reds had a three-game lead.

Cincinnati had the wind at their backs when the series opened on Tuesday night. In a 3-3 game in the eighth, Driessen got things started with a double. An intentional walk to Bench was followed by another walk. With the bases loaded and one out, pinch-hitter Ed Armbrister blooped a double that scored two runs and a subsequent error scored another. The Reds won 6-3.

Billingham was the hero on Wednesday night. He went the distance on the mound, and he hit a bases-loaded double with his bat. Cincinnati won 7-3.

The margin extended to five games, the Reds were in position to go for the kill shot and they won five of their next seven. But the Dodgers re-heated back up and nudged the lead down to 4 ½ games when the two teams met for the last time in Los Angeles on the penultimate weekend.

One win would keep Cincinnati in firm control going into the final week, winning the series would be a death blow and a clean sweep would formally clinch it.

The Friday night opener went extra innings tied 1-1, as Billingham dueled with L.A. starter Claude Osteen. Perez delivered the goods in the top of the 10th, with a three-run blast that won it 4-1.

Cincinnati rolled that momentum over into a Saturday afternoon game, jumping Dodger pitcher Don Sutton for seven runs in the first inning, thanks to three doubles and a triple by Gullett. But Gullett was a little less effective with his arm and had to leave the game by the fifth inning. The lead was narrowed to 11-9 by the bottom of the ninth, L.A. put two runners aboard and had three shots with the winning run at the plate.

Sparky used all three of his key relievers. Borbon got Steve Garvey. Hall retired Willie Davis. And Carroll put down Bill Russell. The win was preserved. Even though a chance to officially ice the race was missed on Sunday with a 6-4 loss, the Reds were coming home and needed just one win to put this to bed.

And they wasted no time, doing it in front of the home fans on Monday night against San Diego. Perez homered. Starting pitcher Dick Baney tossed seven shutout innings. And when Borbon got Dave Hilton to ground out to backup infielder Darrell Chaney at short, Cincinnati was again the champions of the NL West.

## 1973 NLCS

The New York Mets had taken a very different path to get to the 1973 NLCS. The Mets had survived a division race that was defined by mass mediocrity and prevailed with a record of 82-79. But in a short series, starting pitching has a disproportionate impact and anything can happen. Mets pitching happened in this 1973 NLCS.

The rotation called for the first two games to be in Cincinnati, with the remaining three to be played at Shea Stadium in New York.

The great Tom Seaver won the Cy Young Award for the Mets, and he got the ball for Saturday afternoon's Game 1, facing Billingham. And the great pitching that would define this series on both sides got underway.

New York threatened immediately in the top of the first. Wayne Garrett singled, Rusty Staub drew a one-out walk and John Milner singled to load the bases. But Billingham induced Cleon Jones to ground into a 6-4-3 double play to kill the threat. In the top of the second inning, after Bud Harrelson worked a two-out walk, Seaver helped his own cause with an RBI double to put the Mets on the board.

The road underdog had a 1-0 lead, but Billingham settled in, and New York stopped threatening. It was in Seaver's hands. He pitched around a Bench double in the second. After allowing a leadoff double to Driessen in the fourth, Seaver got Perez, Bench, and Ken Griffey Sr. in order to preserve the lead. In the bottom of the fifth, Seaver struck out Pete Rose with two outs and the tying run on second.

Seaver kept dealing and held the 1-0 lead into the eighth. Finally, the Big Red Machine broke through. Rose homered to tie the game. And in the bottom of the ninth, with one out, Bench went deep for the walkoff blast. Cincinnati had a 2-1 win, and they had beaten New York's ace on a day when he clearly had his stuff.

But all the Mets needed was a road split to shift homefield in their favor, and they sent Jon Matlack to the hill on Sunday afternoon to try and even the series up. Gullett started for Cincinnati.

Through three innings, the game was scoreless. In fact, New York was now hitless since Seaver's RBI double the day before. Finally, the drought ended. Staub hit a solo homer in the top of the fourth.

Once again, the pitching dominated, and the Mets held a 1-0 lead. It was like a carbon copy of the day before. Through eight innings, Matlack had allowed only two hits, and with all the great players in the Cincinnati lineup, it was right fielder Andy Kosco who had both singles.

Game 2 had a late-inning breakthrough, but this time it was New York pulling away. With one out in the top of the ninth, Felix Millan singled, Staub walked, and Cleon Jones knocked an RBI base hit, where the throw home allowed the runners to move up to second and third. After an intentional walk loaded the bases, Jerry Grote's two-run single extended the lead to 4-0. It was all but over. The Mets added another run, and Matlack closed out a two-hit, 5-0 shutout.

There was no travel day, so the teams returned to the field on Monday in New York. There was also still no night baseball in LCS play, with prime-time postseason action reserved for the World Series. So, the remainder of this series would all be on weekday afternoons.

Jerry Koosman pitched for the Mets. Grimsley was on the mound for the Reds. Staub homered in the bottom of the first for the game's first run. In the bottom of the second, Grote drew a leadoff walk. Don Hahn singled. After Harrelson lined out, Koosman singled to load up the bases. Garrett's sac fly picked up one run, and Millan's single plated another. It was 3-0 and Grimsley was pulled for Tom Hall. The move didn't work. Staub's power surge continued with a three-run blast and the Mets were ahead 6-0.

Cincinnati tried to bounce right back in the top of the third. Menke homered. Larry Stahl, batting in the pitcher's spot, singled. Rose and Morgan singled. Now it was 6-2 and there were runners on first and second with the muscle of the order coming up. But Koosman got Perez to fly to center and Bench to ground to short. New York's lead stayed comfortable.

And the Mets wasted no time adding on. Grote again got action going in in the home half of the third with a leadoff single. He took second on a productive out and set up Koosman for the RBI single. New York added two more runs in the fourth when Millan's leadoff walk was followed by Cleon Jones' double and John Milner's RBI single.

At 9-2, it was all over but the shouting, and there was plenty of that. This game is remembered for what happened in the top of the fifth. Rose singled with one out. Morgan then grounded to first base, starting a 3-6-3 double play. Rose went hard into Harrelson at second base. The benches cleared. But unless you were a Mets fan, that was the only excitement of the day. Koosman went the distance and the 9-2 score held up.

New York had been in last place as recently as August. Now, quite improbably, they were one win from ousting the best team in baseball. George Stone would take the ball for the Mets on Tuesday. The Reds pinned their hopes on Norman.

For the fourth straight game, New York scored first. This time it was in the third inning. Hahn walked, becoming the game's first baserunner. Stone drew a one-out walk, continuing the trend of tough at-bats by Met pitchers. With two down, Millan's RBI single gave New York a 1-0 lead.

Stone was dealing. Not until Rose singled in the fourth did the Big Red Machine have a hit. And the 1-0 lead held as we went to the seventh. But, similar to Game 1, the Reds would have a late response with the long ball. This time it was Perez who went deep, with one out in the top of the seventh. The game was tied 1-1.

Similar to Game 1, the New York offense basically shut down after getting the initial run. Cincinnati looked ready to grab the lead in the top of the ninth. Rose singled, and then reliever Tug McGraw made an error on Morgan's bunt. There were runners on first and second with none out. McGraw got Perez to pop up, but he walked Bench. Now, with the bases loaded, McGraw struck out Kosco and induced a popup from Menke. The game went to extra innings.

The Reds again loaded the bases in the 10th, after McGraw issued a pair of two-out walks. Perez had a chance to be a hero, but he flew out to right. In the top of the 11th, Kosco and Menke each singled with one out, putting runners on the corners. Geronimo tried to put down a squeeze bunt with two strikes on him, but it went foul. He was out and the inning ended.

Threatening to score just wasn't working for Cincinnati. So, they brought out the longball. Rose homered in the top of the 12th to make it 2-1. The bullpen combination of Clay Carroll and Pedro Borbon retired all nine New York hitters that came to the plate in the extra frames. The Mets had just three singles the entire afternoon. This series would come down to a decisive Game 5.

Wednesday afternoon was a Seaver-Billingham rematch. The Reds, with momentum now on their side, threatened right away in the top of the first. With one out, Morgan and Driessen both singled. There were runners on the corners. A wild pitch allowed Driessen to move to second but kept Morgan at third. Perez was at the plate. In a big showdown, Seaver struck him out. Bench was intentionally walked, and Seaver got Griffey on a fly ball to center. The Mets' ace had escaped.



Thus, once again, the stage was set for New York to draw first blood, and they did in their own half of the first inning. With one out, Millan and Cleon Jones both singled, then Milner walked to load the bases. Ed Kranepool lined a single to left that plated two runs. Billingham struck out Grote and limited the damage there, at 2-0.

Cincinnati bounced back. The Reds halved the lead in the third when Morgan hit a one-out double, took third on an error and scored on Driessen's sac fly. And they tied the game in the fifth, when Rose hit a leadoff double and then scored on a clutch two-out RBI single from Perez. This decisive game of the 1973 NLCS was knotted 2-2 as we went to the bottom of the fifth.

Then came the decisive frame. Garrett led off with a double to right. Millan put a bunt down. Cincinnati went for the out at third and didn't get it. Cleon Jones' double put the Mets up 3-2 and had runners on second and third. Billingham was pulled for Gullett. After a walk to Milner loaded the bases, Carroll came out of the Cincy bullpen.

The great Willie Mays was a shadow of his former self and was playing his last season. He still legged out an infield hit that made it 4-2 and kept the bases filled with one out. Harrelson singled to score two more runs. It was 6-2.

Seaver had all the cushion he needed, although he still doubled and scored in the bottom of the sixth to extend the lead to 7-2. There were no more threats from the Big Red Machine. With two outs in the ninth, Driessen hit a ground ball to first. Seaver covered, got the out and that was the ballgame. In one of the biggest upsets in the history of LCS play, the Mets had won the pennant.

There was no MVP given out in NLCS play until 1977. Seaver would have been the best choice. Even though he took the loss in Game 1, his final pitching line still read 16 2/3 innings pitched, a 1.62 ERA, and a complete-game victory in Game 5. Acknowledgement also has to go to Cleon Jones, who went 6-for-20, and Millan who was 6-for-19 on the series. Staub had only three hits for the entire NLCS, but they were all home runs at significant times.

On the Cincinnati side, Rose had gone 8-for-21, including a late game-tying home run in Game 1 and the go-ahead homer in Game 4. Bench went a respectable 5-for-19 and had been pitched around in several key spots. What ultimately did the Reds in was that Perez and Morgan combined to go 4-for-42. They each had some big hits—especially Perez—but shutting down these two great players was the key to New York's ultimate pitching domination.

Cincinnati was licking their wounds. This loss now joined postseason defeats in 1970 and 1972 to give the Big Red Machine the "can't win the big one" tag.

## 1974

Cincinnati made a couple of moves in the offseason to try and take that final step. They dealt Tolan, who was starting to decline and standing in the way of some rising stars. The trade with San Diego netted the Reds a quality starting pitcher in Clay Kirby, who would make 35 starts, go 12-9 and post a 3.28 ERA in 1974.

That trade worked out better than the one that sent Grimsley to Baltimore in exchange for outfielder Merv Rettenmund. Grimsley continued to pitch well for an Oriole team that won a division title. Rettenmund had a respectable .337 on-base percentage but was a part-time player.

Overall, with one good addition and one unfortunate subtraction, Cincinnati pitching was still an asset. Gullet was the staff ace, winning 17 games with a 3.04 ERA. Billingham racked up 19 victories and his ERA was 3.94. Norman only made 26 starts, but his 3.14 ERA was still good enough to win 13 games. Roger Nelson and 21-year-old Tom Carroll were effective in spot-starting duty.



Sparky Anderson's bullpen was built around the duo of Borbon and Clay Carroll. Borbon logged 139 innings, saved 14 games, won ten more and posted a 3.24 ERA. Clay Carroll worked 100 innings with a dazzling ERA of 2.15, with 12 wins and six saves. All in all, the Reds' pitching staff ranked third in the National League for ERA.

The bats were what the Big Red Machine was renowned for, and their name players had vintage seasons. Bench, hit 33 homers and drove in 129 runs. Perez played first base and popped 28 home runs with 101 RBIs. Morgan was at second base and his OBP soared to .427. He hit 22 homers and mixed in 58 stolen bases. And Rose was in leftfield, racking up an OBP of .385, and hitting 45 doubles.

Cincinnati's core four of Bench, Perez, Morgan, and Rose fueled the offense, but there were no easy outs. Three players—Driessen, Concepcion, and Geronimo all batted .281 and had good OBPs. Griffey had a .331 OBP. George Foster joined Rettenmund in providing depth and finished with a .343 OBP. The Reds' attack scored the second-most runs in the National League.

Cincinnati played five games with Los Angeles in the early part of the season and lost all five, giving up 33 runs in the process. The Reds played reasonably well against everyone else and were 23-19 on Memorial Day. But the Dodgers were blazing and with a record of 33-13, held an eight-game lead.

Cincy won four straight series out of the holiday weekend but failed to make a dent in the eight-game deficit. They played consistently throughout the month of June, losing a pair of series against the Montreal Expos (today's Washington Nationals), but winning everywhere else. It only narrowed the deficit to 7 ½ games.

When the Reds got another shot at the Dodgers in a four-game home series, they lost three times. This time the bats failed, scoring just 11 runs—six of those in the single game they won. With a record of 49-37, Cincinnati was ten games off the pace.

A trip to Pittsburgh, who was en route to another division title, saw things pick back up. The Reds won four out of five. They swept three straight against a Cardinal team that would contend to the final day of the season. Cincinnati rolled into the All-Star break with a record of 58-40. The lead was down to 5 ½ games. The Reds and Dodgers were easily the best two teams in all of baseball.

Even though Cincinnati went 8-4 coming out of the break, that still cost them a game in the standings. They were 6 ½ back when they went to Los Angeles on August 5.

Monday's opener didn't go well. Gullett pitched six good innings and was in a 2-2 tie but got beaten by a grand slam in the seventh, ultimately losing 6-3. On Tuesday night, Carroll hung in with Dodger great Don Sutton and the game was tied 3-3, going to extra innings. The Reds had to make a move. The time for wasting head-to-head opportunities was past.

Facing L.A. reliever Mike Marshall, who would win the Cy Young Award, Cincinnati got a leadoff single from Rose and a home run from Bench. An insurance run sealed a badly needed 6-3 win. Bench did it again the next night, with an early two-run homer that staked Billingham to a 2-0 lead. Billingham made that stand up the rest of the way with a six-hit shutout.

The Reds came out of the series and went 13-8 into Labor Day. But the Dodgers were starting to cool down, and now simply playing good baseball was enough to cut into the lead. Cincinnati was 81-53, 3 ½ games out, as the stretch drive beckoned.

But another head-to-head opportunity would be missed. Los Angeles came to old Riverfront Stadium for a three-game series and grabbed two wins. On September 13, when the Reds went back to Dodger Stadium, the deficit was still 3 ½ games. Cincinnati absolutely had to win this series and could really use a sweep.

Billingham went on Friday night and took a 3-2 lead into the eighth. Concepcion opened it up with a three-run blast and the Reds won 6-3. On Saturday, Gullett worked into the eighth, backed up by home runs from Perez and Morgan. The Reds won 4-2. The deficit was down to 1 ½ games as we went into the Sunday finale.

For five innings, behind Norman, Cincinnati led 1-0. But Norman gave up a couple runs in the sixth. And when Borbon came on in relief, he didn't have it. The Reds ultimately lost 7-1. At 2 ½ games out, and 2 ½ weeks to go, they were still alive. But it would be a difficult road to travel.

And the following week, still on the West Coast, would be a killer blow. Cincinnati lost five of seven games against the San Diego Padres and San Francisco Giants. They were now 4 ½ games out. The Reds tried to rally, sweeping six games at home with the Atlanta Braves and Houston Astros and staying alive as the season reached its final three games. But they would need everything to go right—the Reds needed the Dodgers to lose three straight against Houston, while Cincy had to sweep its season-ending two-game set in Atlanta.

Hope was kept alive on Monday when Los Angeles lost while Cincinnati was idle. But Tuesday, the penultimate day of the season, was when hope was extinguished. The Reds fell behind the Braves early and lost 7-1. And in either case, the Dodgers won in Houston. The NL West race was over.

Cincinnati's final record was 98-64. Not only was this the second-best record in baseball, but they cleared everyone except Los Angeles by seven full games. It was an exceptional year, as good as any the Reds had enjoyed to this point. But in the era before wild-cards, it wasn't enough.

## 1975

Over the past five years, the Reds have won plenty of baseball games. They've won big pennant races and dramatic postseason battles. There's only one thing left to do. By 1975, Cincinnati had reached the point that all successful organizations ultimately do—where it becomes championship-or-bust.

Morgan had an MVP year in 1975, posting a stat line of .466 on-base percentage/.508 slugging percentage and stealing 67 bases. Bench hit 28 home runs and had 110 RBIs, while Perez had 20/109. Rose's OBP was .406.

Griffey had a .391 OBP and great speed on the basepaths. Foster was coming into his own and hit 23 home runs in 1975. Geronimo in centerfield and Concepcion at shortstop weren't big offensive threats, but each could run and each was a superior defender at a position where that was the most important quality.

The Big Red Machine lacked a clear ace, but they had good staff balance. Nolan won 15 games with 3.16 ERA. Billingham won 15 more at 4.11. Gullett went 15-4 with a 2.42 ERA.

It was depth though, that ultimately characterized the Cincy pitching staff in 1975. In an era when starting pitchers routinely piled up season-long workloads of 250-plus innings, the Reds' numbers look more like our age today, with Nolan topping the staff at 210 and Billingham being the only other arm to clear 200.

The bullpen made up for it. Borbon took on a big workload, threw 125 innings and posted a 2.95 ERA. Carroll and McEnaney were similarly effective and Eastwick saved 22 games, a fairly high total in an era when the complete game was still expected from starters.

Cincinnati's pitchers collectively finished third in the National League in ERA. That was more than enough for an offense that dominated the league. The Reds not only led the NL in runs scored, but the margin between them and #2 was greater than the margin of the offenses ranking 2 thru 9.

The Dodgers came to Riverfront Stadium to start the season. The fans at Monday afternoon's opener got their money's worth—14 innings of baseball. Gullett pitched into the 10th. The Reds bullpen matched up with L.A. reliever Mike Marshall, who had won the Cy Young Award and kept it a 1-1 game for five innings while Marshall pitched. He was out by the 14th when Cincinnati started a soft rally.

Concepcion beat out an infield hit, then took second on a passed ball. After a walk to Geronimo, a sacrifice bunt set up the Reds with runners on second and third and one out. An infield ground

ball resulted in Concepcion being cut down at the plate. With two outs, another infield hit, this one from Foster, brought in Geronimo with the winning run.

After a day off, more walkoff drama awaited on Wednesday. Cincinnati trailed 3-0 after five, but Carroll and Borbon held the line out of the bullpen. It was 3-2 by the bottom of the ninth. That's when Griffey led off with a triple, Darrell Chaney tied with a base hit, and after a sac bunt, Concepcion won it with an RBI single.

Had enough excitement? Not so fast. The Reds dug themselves an early 5-0 hole on Thursday night. In the bottom of the fourth, Foster led off with a home run. That triggered a five-run rally to tie it. At 6-6 in the bottom of the eighth, two hit batsman set up Perez for a two-out RBI double and a 7-6 win.

As dramatic and satisfying as it was to sweep your nemesis to start the season, it still didn't take long for Cincinnati to give it back. They went west and lost six of seven—that includes dropping four straight to the Dodgers, two of them in walkoff fashion. A 4-6 trip to the East Coast in early May had the Reds 5 ½ back. They didn't get over .500 for good until May 21. On Memorial Day, Cincinnati was 24-20, and 3 ½ games behind Los Angeles.

It was the early part of summer when this edition of the Big Red Machine became what they are remembered for. They swept Montreal out of the holiday weekend, and swept Chicago in the early part of June, to nudge into first place. After dropping a couple games at home to Pittsburgh, the Reds held a narrow half-game lead on June 11.

They did not lose a series between then and the All-Star break. Over that stretch, Cincinnati went a torrid 27-5. While L.A. did not play particularly well, the Dodgers still had to feel like someone had clocked them with a haymaker. The Reds' record at the break was a stunning 61-29 and their NL West lead was a massive 12 ½ games.

The margin was still 12 ½ on July 25. The Reds and Dodgers had 11 head-to-head games remaining and seven of them would take place over these next two weekends. Cincinnati simply needed to hold serve to effectively put this race to bed.

A Friday doubleheader at Riverfront started the sequence. Los Angeles took the opener 4-3 and had Cincy in a 3-1 hole in the seventh inning of the nightcap. In the bottom of that inning, Marv Rettenmund singled. Bill Plummer walked. Griffey's base hit cut the lead to 3-2. Then Rose showed some rare power—a three-run blast to right. Cincinnati won 6-3.

Rose kept rolling on Saturday afternoon with a four-hit day to key a 5-3 win behind Billingham. The Reds lost the Sunday finale in another 5-3 decision, but splitting this four-game set was more than enough.

The following weekend in Los Angeles, the Cincy bullpen coughed up a 3-0 lead on Friday night and Borbon ultimately lost in extra innings, 5-3. But on Saturday night, the Carrolls (second-year starter Tom, along with Clay—no relation) took over. They combined on a shutout. Foster's solo blast was the only run in a 1-0 win. On Sunday, it was Pat Darcy and Eastwick combining on a gem while Concepcion homered. The final was 3-1.

It was early August, and the race was all but over. By Labor Day, Cincinnati was 90-45, and the lead had ballooned to 18 ½ games. They finished the year 108-54. It was enough to clear the field in the NL West by twenty games, and it was ten games better than anyone else in baseball.

This had to be the Reds' year, didn't it? It was time to find out. October was here.

## 1975 NLCS

The Reds were back and so were the Pirates. The NLCS opened on a Saturday in Cincinnati's old Riverfront Stadium. Each team had its rotation lined up, and the aces—Gullett for the Reds and Jerry Reuss for the Pirates—ready to go.

Pittsburgh drew first blood when right fielder Dave Parker was hit by a pitch with two outs in the top of the second. Richie Hebner picked up the RBI with a double and then light-hitting shortstop Frank Taveras singled to make it 2-0.



Cincinnati got one back in the bottom of the inning with consecutive two-out singles and then Gullett helped his cause with an RBI base hit. It was just the beginning of what the Reds' pitcher would do at the plate.

In the bottom of the third, Morgan drew a walk and then swiped both second and third. Bench was walked. Perez singled in the tying run. Reuss got two outs and looked like he might escape with a 2-2 tie, but Ken Griffey slashed a two-run double and the Pirate starter took an early shower.

The fifth inning broke the game open. Three straight singles from Perez, Foster and Concepcion loaded the bases with no one out. A productive ground ball out from Griffey made the score 5-2. Geronimo hit a sac fly to add another run. The coup de grace came from Gullett—the pitcher hit a two-run homer to make it 8-2, and the game ended with an 8-3 final.

Cincinnati came back on Sunday and didn't take their foot off the gas. Rose singled to lead off the home half of the first inning. Pittsburgh starter Jim Rooker was able to get Morgan and Bench, but Perez took it deep for a 2-0 lead.



Pittsburgh's veteran first baseman Willie Stargell got a run back in the top of the fourth with an RBI double off Norman, but the Reds came roaring right back in their own half of the fourth frame.

Three straight singles from Foster, Concepcion and Griffey made the score 3-1 and had runners on first and second. The aggressive Reds then employed a double steal and both Concepcion and Griffey were safe.

For the second straight game, a Cincinnati pitcher helped himself at the plate—Norman picked up a run with a sac fly and it was 4-1. And for the second straight game a Pittsburgh starter didn't make it through five innings.

The Reds added some insurance when Griffey singled to lead off the sixth, stole both second and third and scored on a balk. Perez later delivered an RBI single in the same inning, and the 6-1 final put Cincinnati on the brink of a pennant.

No team had rallied from an 0-2 deficit since LCS play was instituted as a best-of-five in 1969, but Pittsburgh would get the rest of the series at home in Three Rivers Stadium. They sent John Candelaria to the mound and the lefty did what he could to keep his team's season alive.

The Reds were able to get a run in the second when the normally light-hitting Concepcion went deep for a solo home run. It stayed 1-0 into the sixth when the Pirates got to Cincy starter Gary Nolan. A single from Hebner and a home run by Al Oliver made it 2-1.

Candelaria bailed his team out in the seventh. Bench reached on an error, and even the catcher got in on the base stealing display, taking his own turn at swiping both second and third. Candelaria came up with a big strikeout of Perez, got out of the inning and with the 2-1 lead intact, it looked like the Pirates might live to fit another day.

Fate was cruel in the eighth though. Candelaria got the first two batters out. Then, after having controlled the Big Red Machine's lineup of future Hall of Famers all night long, he walked pinch-hitter Marv Rettenmund. It flipped the lineup to the top and Rose homered.

Cincinnati was three outs from a pennant, but they wouldn't get them in the ninth. Stargell and Zisk both singled, and Pittsburgh would load the bases with two outs. Now it was their turn for a no-name pinch-hitter to drive opposing fans crazy. Duffy Dyer drew a game-tying walk and we were going extra innings.

Griffey got one more Reds rally going in the 10th, with a leadoff single. He moved up to second on a balk, and took third on a ground ball out by Geronimo. A sac fly from Ed Armbrister brought in the lead run. For all of the firepower the Reds had, they could move baserunners and execute in key spots, and it gave them the last lead they would need in the 1975 NLCS.

Consecutive hits from Rose and Morgan added an insurance run and Borbon set the side down in the 10th. The 5-3 win gave the Cincinnati Reds their third National League pennant in six years.

There was no MVP award given in LCS play in 1975. Candidates would include Concepcion, whose .455 batting average led Cincinnati regulars. Morgan stole four bases, the leading total on a team whose 11 steals defined this series. Gullett had virtually won Game 1 by himself with his arm and his bat.

All of those were good candidates, but I think the best candidate would be Perez. He hit .417, had four RBIs and his two-out, two-run shot early in Game 2 solidified all the momentum the Reds established at home early in the series.

## 1975 WORLD SERIES

The 1975 World Series was supposed to present a changing-of-the-guard moment for major league baseball. The theory was that the teams with the two best records—the Reds and Oakland A's—would square off. Oakland had won three consecutive World Series, while the Big Red Machine was looking for their first championship. But the A's came up short, with the upstart Boston Red Sox winning the ALCS.

Fenway Park was where the World Series opened. Luis Tiant, the 34-year-old Cuban righthander with a twirling motion that resulted in his back being turned to the hitter was on the mound for Boston. Gullett, 24-years-old and his star on the rise, got the ball for Cincinnati.

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

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

Five singles and a walk, the first RBI coming from 35-year-old veteran Carl Yastrzemski, resulted in six runs. The game ended 6-0 and Boston had sent a message that this Series would not be a coronation party for the Big Red Machine.

Bill Lee, a crafty lefthander, took the mound for Boston on Sunday and he continued the bafflement of the Big Red Machine. The Red Sox got an early run on a two-out RBI single from Fisk in the first. They missed a chance in the second when Evans was gunned down by Bench on an attempt to steal third with two on and one out.

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

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

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

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

Ironically, these same two cities played in football on this Sunday afternoon, and Boston fans had to feel like they were jinxed. The Bengals and Patriots were tied 10-10 into the third quarter, when a sudden outburst by Cincinnati resulted in a 27-10 win. Sunday, October 12, just hadn't been Boston's day.



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

Rick Wise, the 18-game winner for the Red Sox, had been continuing with the strong pitching that Boston's starters were given, but the second time through the lineup didn't go as well. In the fourth, Perez walked and Bench homered to make it a 2-1 game.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fisk and Lynn started it with singles, and an Evans triple tied the game. Burleson doubled, and now the Red Sox were up 3-2. Sparky went to his bullpen. Borbon had been both effective and a horse all year long, and he'd closed out the NLCS in extra innings. Game 4 of the World Series wasn't his night. Tiant singled. Perez committed an uncharacteristic error. Burleson and Yastrzemski each hit RBI singles and it was 5-2.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The game went into the 11th. With one out and Rose aboard, Morgan came to the plate. It had not been a good World Series for the NL MVP. When he ripped a ball to deep right, it appeared all that was going to be put behind Morgan. Instead, Evans made an amazing catch going into the seats, kept his presence of mind to quickly get up and double off Rose, who had assumed what every rational person in America would have—that the ball had no chance to be caught.

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

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

Carbo was in the lineup and batting leadoff for Game 7 and he led off the bottom of the first with a double, but was not able to score. With one out in the third, Carbo drew a walk and Doyle singled. Another single from Yastrzemski put the first run of the game on the board. For some reason, Anderson opted to walk Fisk and load the bases with Lynn coming up. I daresay an intentional pass to face the league MVP falls into the category of “unorthodox”. Or “stupid.”

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

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

Messing around with a pitch like this might be justifiable if you were struggling for outs. Not when you’ve spent the better part of two games owning a lineup. Lee’s choice of pitches makes Anderson’s intentional walk look like inspired brilliance by comparison. Perez hit a home run over the Green Monster and it was 3-2.

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

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



Whatever frustration Morgan had suffered throughout the series, whatever angst Evans had caused him the night before, it all went away on this at-bat against Jim Burton. A nasty breaking pitch was on the outside corner, but Morgan looped it up between Burleson and Lynn in short centerfield. Morgan, in future years as an ESPN commentator, would acknowledge the quality of the pitch. But it scored the run that decided the 1975 World Series, as the Red Sox went quietly in the ninth.

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

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

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

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

What Cincinnati had—at long last, after 35 years of waiting—was a World Series trophy. Had they lost this Series, this group of players would have had the “Can't Win The Big One” tag trailing them around. Instead, they were just getting started on a dynasty.

## 1976

The Machine had a couple of big names deal with off-years in 1976. Bench would hit only .234 in 1976. Perez also saw his numbers dip. It makes you wonder how good they might have been otherwise. Because the rest of the Machine's cogs were more than enough to pick up the slack.

Rose was still going strong and hit .323, with 42 doubles that easily led the team and led the NL with 130 runs scored. Foster was becoming one of the great power hitters in the National League and his 121 RBIs were tops in the NL. Griffey delivered an on-base percentage of .401

Above all, Joe Morgan was an all-around dominating offensive force. Morgan's .444 on-base percentage and .576 slugging percentage each led the league and he won the MVP for the second straight year.

When the All-Star Game was played at the old Veterans Stadium in Philadelphia, five Reds—Bench, Rose, Morgan, Concepcion and Foster were voted in as starters.

Anderson never did have a dominating staff, the way teams like the A's and Orioles did during this period. But Sparky continued to squeeze the most out of the arms he had. He made regular use of six starters, getting them all at least 20 starts. Nolan was the best of the group, winning 15 games and piling up 239 innings, but he was more first-among-equals rather than a true ace. Pat Zachry won 15 and Gullett won 11 in his twenty times to the post.

The bullpen was mostly a two-man show with Eastwick winning 11 games and saving 26 more, while Borbon worked over 120 innings with a 3.35 ERA.

Just like 1975, Cincinnati rounded into form slowly. They were 12-10 on May 6. A trip to Wrigley Field and a three-game sweep started a spurt that got the Reds to 24-16. They were two games behind the Dodgers. Los Angeles was coming to town for a four-game series over Memorial Day weekend.

Cincinnati took control of Friday night's opener immediately. Morgan hit a three-run jack. Bench hit a solo blast. Zachry tossed a five-hit shutout in an easy 9-0 win.

Saturday afternoon offered more drama. Billingham struggled and the Reds trailed 5-3 going into the bottom of the ninth. Concepcion and Geronimon opened the final frame with singles, giving some hope. A sac bunt moved the tying runs into scoring position. Rose grounded out. Down to their last chance, the Reds got a triple from Griffey to tie the game. Morgan knocked a single to center and the Reds had a thrilling 6-5 win.



The first game of a Sunday doubleheader was another good one. Concepcion's three hits helped Cincinnati get a 5-4 lead by the seventh inning. But this time, Borbon and Eastwick couldn't hold the lead and it ended in a 6-5 loss. But the Reds resumed control in the nightcap—Perez, Geronimo and Bill Plummer all homered. Spot starter Santo Alcala gave six good innings and the final was 7-2. The Reds were tied for first in the NL West.

Over the early part of summer, Cincinnati took five of eight from Pittsburgh. They grabbed another two wins at home from Los Angeles. They won a series in San Diego, who had lingered around the fringes of the race in the early months. The only downside was losing four of five games to the Philadelphia Phillies, who were on their way to dethroning the Pirates in the NL East. By the All-Star break, the Reds were 53-33 and had pushed out to a six-game lead over the Dodgers.

A strong 16-6 surge out of the break had the lead up to nine games by the first weekend in August. Cincinnati went west for a four-game series in L.A. The Reds had a chance to put the hammer down in the division race.

Norman tossed a complete game in Thursday night's opener. Backed by three hits from Rose and a home run by Perez, it was enough for a 3-2 win. Friday's game went to the ninth inning tied 3-3. Morgan homered. Foster, Bench, Concepcion, and Rose all singled, wrapped around a Geronimo wall. Cincy had blown it open and won 7-4. They were assured of no worse than a split.

But a split wasn't enough—the Reds were going for the kill shot. Zachry pitched eight brilliant innings on Saturday, Foster hit a three-run bomb and Cincinnati won 4-1. Billingham was the hero of Sunday—he had two hits and an RBI. He pitched 8  $\frac{2}{3}$  innings of great baseball and led 3-2. With two on and two out in the ninth, Eastwick slammed the door on the game—and, for all practical purposes, the 1976 NL West race.

Los Angeles did creep back to within eight games by Labor Day. But it never got closer. Cincinnati promptly re-extended their lead. When all was said and done, the Reds were 102-60—ten games better than the Dodgers and the best record in baseball.

They were heading back to the postseason. And this time, some new sparring partners awaited.

## **1976 NLCS**

The Reds and Philadelphia Phillies were two teams with decidedly different pedigrees when they met for the pennant in the 1976 NLCS. The Phillies were the up-and-comers, who had displaced the Pittsburgh Pirates in the NL East. While the Phils would become postseason regulars in the ensuing eight years, they were a fresh face in 1976.

The first two games would be in Philadelphia, at Veterans Stadium, before going to Cincinnati and the Riverfront for the balance of the series.

Philadelphia had a future Hall of Famer, lefthander Steve Carlton, to pitch Saturday's Game 1, and he was promptly greeted with a double by Rose. The Reds loaded the bases with one out, but Carlton struck out Foster and got Bench to pop up.

The Phils got their own leadoff double from Dave Cash, and they—no pun intended—cashed in. Garry Maddox moved Cash up with a ground ball and Mike Schmidt picked up the run with a sac fly.

Rose got after Carlton again with a triple to lead off the third, and Griffey immediately walked and stole second. The Reds again left runs on the table. Perez was able to tie the game with a sac fly, but after three innings, the Phils could have been in a lot worse shape than tied 1-1. The pattern continued in the fifth when Griffey lashed a one-out triple, but was doubled off on an ensuing line drive out by Morgan.

Gullett was keeping the Philadelphia bats under control through, and in the top of the sixth, the Reds work against Carlton finally began to bear fruit. Foster homered with one out to break the tie. With two outs, Concepcion doubled and a key error by Schmidt kept the inning alive. Gullett, as he had in the opener of the 1975 NLCS, helped his own cause with an RBI base hit to make it 3-1.

The game was broke open in the top of the eighth. When Bench and Concepcion reached to start the inning, Carlton was removed. Gullett again did the work with his bat, drilling a two-run double and Rose promptly doubled the pitcher home.

Philadelphia got two runs in the ninth, to make it 6-3, and had two runners aboard with one out. They had two cracks with the tying run at the plate against Eastwick, but it was the bottom of the order due up. Eastwick got pinch-hitters Bobby Tolan and Tom Hutton to close out Game 1.

The Phillies had lost at home with their ace on the mound, but they didn't roll over and die. Jim Lonborg took the hill in Game 2 and pitched well, keeping Cincinnati quiet for five innings. Philadelphia picked up a run in the second, but after the bases were loaded and no one out, the 1-0 lead was a little disappointing. Greg Luzinski added a two-out homer in the fifth to give Lonborg a 2-zip lead.

In the sixth, Cincinnati got rolling. Concepcion drew a leadoff walk, moved up on a ground ball out and scored on a single by Rose. Griffey singled, and then took second when the throw from the outfield went to third. Morgan was intentionally walked to load the bases and bring up Perez.

Perez hit the ball sharply to first base, where it was mishandled by Allen. Rose and Griffey both scored and Cincinnati had the lead. Foster's ground ball to the right side picked up Morgan and after having been contained for five innings, the Big Red Machine was suddenly ahead 4-2.

Philadelphia never got another rally going, as the Cincinnati bullpen closed it out, with help from two insurance runs on the seventh, with Rose, Griffey and Perez again at the heart of the action.

It would be 1982 before a team would win an LCS after losing the first two games, and with the best team in baseball going home with three chances, it seemed quite unlikely that this series would be the one to set a new precedent.

Of course, from the perspective of history, we know that rallies from 0-2 down have become more common and the good baseball fans of Cincinnati lived through three consecutive home losses in 2012, at the hands of the San Francisco Giants.

All of which is to say that while history makes Cincinnati's roll through October seem almost pre-ordained, there was no reason to see it that way leading up to Tuesday night's Game 3 was an outstanding back-and-forth baseball game in which Philadelphia seemed to be getting momentum, only to have the veteran Reds rip it from their grasp.

Phillie starter Jim Kaat was brilliant, and he cruised through the first six innings, pitching shutout baseball. Philadelphia got a run in the fourth when Schmidt and Luzinski each hit consecutive doubles. In the seventh, Phillie shortstop Larry Bowa drew a leadoff walk, and with two outs, it was Maddox and Schmidt who hit consecutive doubles. It was 3-0 when the Reds finally got going into the bottom of the seventh.

Griffey singled and Morgan walked, resulting in Kaat's removal for towering righthander Ron Reed. The reliever was not effective. Perez singled in a run and with runners on the corners, Foster hit a sac fly. Philly still held a 3-2 lead with two on and two out. Geronimo then tripled in two runs.

With their season down to six outs, the Phillies could have been forgiven if they would have just called it a great year and mailed it in. But they didn't, showing the comeback tenacity that would bear its ultimate fruit when a lot of this core group won the World Series four years later.

Jay Johnston doubled, setting up a first-and-third with one out situation. Bowa doubled to tie the game, and Cash hit a sac fly to give the Phils the lead. When a Johnstone triple in the top of the ninth led to a run that made it 6-4, it looked like we'd come back for Game 4 and a little bit of pressure on the Reds.

But Reed, still in the game, immediately gave up home runs to Foster and Bench to open the ninth and just like that, the game was tied. Concepcion singled, Geronimo walked, and they were bunted up. With one out, Rose was intentionally walked. The speedy Griffey chopped the ball in

the infield and Concepcion came home with the run that brought Cincinnati its fourth pennant of the 1970s.

There was still no MVP of the League Championship Series named at this point, but Rose would have been the certain choice, with his .429 average for the three games and big hits at so many key moments. A huge shout-out has to go to Philadelphia's Johnston, who went 7-for-9 with a walk and whose Game 3 heroics should have bought his team another day to breathe.

## 1976 WORLD SERIES

One team was the powerful defending champions, already one of the dominant teams of the decade and looking to secure the legacy of a dynasty. Another was the team making its first World Series appearance in over a decade. It was the Cincinnati Reds and New York Yankees. But unlike what we would expect today, it was the Reds aiming for a dynasty and the Yankees who were thrilled to be back at the party.

Cincinnati held homefield advantage for this year. The Yankees' best starting pitchers were drained after a dramatic ALCS with the Kansas City Royals, and they turned to untested 25-year-old Doyle Alexander. And it took the Reds precisely three batters to get to him. With two outs in the first, Morgan homered and Cincy was up 1-0.

New York was able to quickly counter in the top of the second, as Lou Piniella doubled to lead off the inning and scored on productive outs from Chris Chambliss and Graig Nettles. Cincinnati reclaimed the lead in the third, on a triple by Concepcion and Rose's sac fly.

Alexander settled down, and through the middle innings the Yankees had their chances against Gullett. New York had two on with none out in the fifth, before Gullett got a double play ball to escape. And with two aboard in the sixth, speedy Yankee leadoff man Mickey Rivers took a lead off second a bit too long, and was gunned down by Johnny Bench.



The Reds were an aggressive running team and made the first use of their speed in the bottom of the sixth. After Rose walked, he was replaced on the bases by Ken Griffey, who grounded into a force play. Griffey promptly stole second and then scored on a single by Tony Perez.

Gullett, having survived the fifth and sixth, worked a clean seventh and into the eighth inning. Cincinnati got some insurance when George Foster singled, Bench tripled him home and then scored on a wild pitch. Game 1 of the Series had gone to form, with the Reds getting a comfortable 5-1 win.

Cincinnati looked like it might blow Game 2 open quickly against Yankee starter Catfish Hunter. Dan Driessen, getting his chance as the DH, doubled to start the bottom of the second, and scored on a single from Foster. Even though the latter was caught stealing, Bench doubled, Geronimo walked, and Concepcion singled to make it 2-0. Geronimo took third on the base hit and scored on a sac fly from Griffey.

It was 3-0, but the Yankees didn't go quietly into oblivion. Hunter escaped a jam in the third, and then put it on cruise control through eight. It gave his teammates a chance to get back in it, though every Yankee run seemed like pulling teeth.

Thurman Munson beat out an infield hit in the top of the fourth, followed by singles from Chambliss and Nettles. The latter was able to take second on a throw to third, and there was only one out. But Elliot Maddox, the DH, struck out and enabled Cincy starter Fred Norman to get out of the inning at 3-1.

Maddox had a chance to redeem himself with two on and one out in the sixth, but grounded into a double play. The Yankees finally pulled even in the seventh, on a single from Willie Randolph, a double by Fred Stanley and another infield hit from Munson.

Jack Billingham came out of the Cincinnati bullpen and settled things down, keeping the game tied 3-3 in the bottom of the ninth. Hunter was still on the mound and he got the first two batters out. Griffey hit a grounder into the hole at short. Stanley made a bad throw, and Griffey wound up on second. Perez singled him in, and just like that, a strong Yankee effort still ended in a 4-3 loss.

It was time for the Fall Classic to return to the Bronx and the newly renovated Yankee Stadium, where the Yanks had returned after spending a couple seasons sharing Shea Stadium with the Mets while the remodeling was taking place.

Driessen again made his mark early in, beating out an infield hit in the second inning, stealing second base and scoring a double by Foster. Cincinnati was all over New York starter Dock Ellis. Bench beat out an infield hit. Geronimo replaced him on the bases after a force out that scored Foster. Geronimo promptly stole second and scored on a Concepcion single. Two innings later, Driessen delivered again, with a home run that made it 4-3.

Zachry had a strong outing, and though the Yanks scraped over a run in the fourth, it was not until the seventh that New York made its first real threat at winning Game 3.

A light-hitting shortstop, Jim Mason, hit a surprise home run with one out to make it a 4-2 game. Rivers drew a walk, and with two outs, Munson singled. Zachry departed and Will McEnaney came on to face Chris Chambliss, who represented the lead run and had been the hero of the ALCS with a walkoff home run to win it. But there no heroics this time—Chambliss grounded to first.

The Reds got singles from Rose and Griffey in the eight. Morgan knocked in Rose with a double, and then Griffey came around on a base hit by Foster. There were no more Yankee rallies. The Series was all but settled after the 6-2 win, but New York still hoped to avoid being swept in their own backyard.

Munson was the Yankee captain and MVP of the American League, and his two-out single in the bottom of the first inning in Game 4 was the first of his four hits tonight. He scored on a double by Chambliss, as they gave 19-game winner Ed Figueroa an early run.

In an ideal New York world—where the rotation was lined up, Figueroa would have pitched one of the games in Cincinnati, but the extended ALCS kept him out until tonight. He kept the Reds quiet through three, but in the fourth inning, the Big Red Machine broke through.

Morgan walked and stole second, and then with two outs, the real damage came. Foster tied the game with an RBI single and Bench unloaded for a two-run homer. It was 3-1 and Cincy starter Gary Nolan had all the runs he would need.

New York had a rally in the fourth, two on and no outs, but this time it was Nettles' turn to stray too far off second and be picked off by Bench. The Yanks did crawl to within 3-2 in the fifth when Rivers singled, stole second and scored on a base hit by Munson.

But the game went to the ninth, still at 3-2. In the top of the inning, Cincinnati stripped whatever minimal drama remained in this Series. After two walks, Figueroa was removed and Bench greeted Dick Tidrow by going deep. For good measure, Geronimo and Concepcion each doubled to make it 7-2.

We would say the Yankees went quietly in the ninth, but nothing with Billy Martin in the dugout ever happens quietly. The New York manager was ejected for throwing a baseball onto the field, the last fireworks before the Big Red Machine closed its second straight title.

Bench was named 1976 World Series MVP. He went 8-for-15 in the four games, homered twice and had six RBIs, in addition to his defensive prowess. If you want to pick a nit with this selection, it can be pointed out that virtually all of Bench's power damage—both home runs and five of the ribbies—came in Game 4, when the Series was already all but over. But he also went 6-for-11 in the first three games, and was a worthy selection.

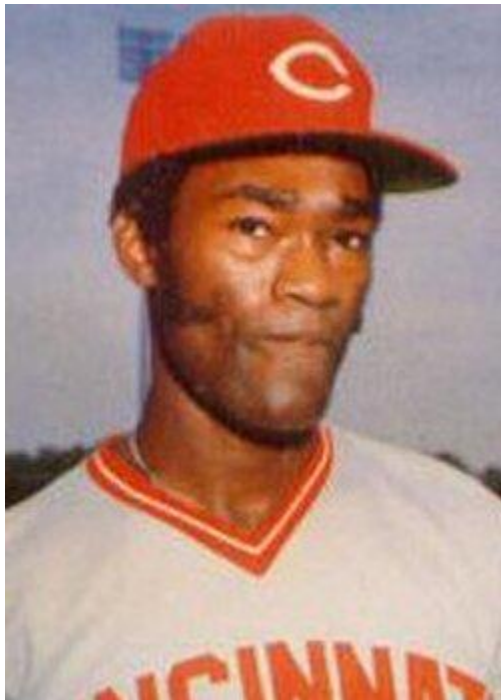
Honorable mention goes to Driessen, for his tone-setting play in Games 2 & 3, along with the .429 average posted by Foster.

But the biggest honorable mention goes to the Big Red Machine itself. With two World Series titles to go with their four NL pennants and five NL West crowns, there was no denying they were a true dynasty.

## 1977

Cincinnati suffered a big loss to their everyday lineup when Perez was traded. The first baseman had a well-deserved reputation for clutch hitting. But his replacement, Dan Driessen, still had a good year. Driessen hit .300 and stole 31 bases. And the Reds' offense continued to be prolific.

Joe Morgan was still at second base and while he wasn't up to the MVP levels he'd reached the prior two years, Morgan still finished with a stat line of .417 on-base percentage/.478 slugging percentage, and he stole 49 bases. Pete Rose was at third base, and Rose churned out another 200-hit season. Dave Concepcion, the reliable shortstop, played great defense and stole 29 bases. Johnny Bench was still behind the plate and the great catcher rebounded from his slow 1976 regular season, hitting 31 homers and driving in 109 runs. Ken Griffey Sr. was in right field, and his stat line was a stellar .389/.467.



All of those players were good. But no one was better—at least not in 1977—than George Foster. The leftfielder simply went off the charts. He hit 52 home runs, posted 149 RBIs and scored 124 runs. All of those led the league. Want more? Foster hit .320. He won the National League MVP award, and the Cincinnati offense scored the second-most runs in the NL.

The problem with the three-peat bid came with the pitching staff. Woodie Fryman had been the key piece acquired in the Perez deal, but the 37-year-old pitcher struggled to a 5.38 ERA and only made 12 starts. Jack Billingham's ERA was on the wrong side of 5.

There were some strengths. Fred Norman, at the age of 34, won 14 games with a 3.38 ERA. Reliever Pedro Borbon saved 18 games and finished with a 3.19 ERA. The Reds desperately needed help for a pitching staff that would finish 10th in what was then a 12-team National League for composite ERA. They would make a bold move to get that help before the season was out. But that's getting ahead of our story.

Cincinnati stumbled badly to open the season, losing 10 of their first 14 games. In early May, after getting swept three straight in Pittsburgh, the Reds were down to 10-15. On Memorial Day weekend, they were 18-22 and coming to Los Angeles for what had turned into a must-win series.

This year, L.A. was off to a torrid start and had the Reds in a 12 ½ game hole when this holiday weekend series began.

It got worse on Friday night. Pat Zachry took the mound and dug himself a quick 5-0 hole. Foster homered, but it wasn't enough to avoid a 10-3 shellacking. On Saturday afternoon, things got a little better. In the top of the second, Foster homered, Rose hit a two-run single, and Griffey ripped a two-run blast. Staked to the 5-0 lead, Billingham delivered a 6-3 win. In the Sunday finale, Bench hit a grand slam in the first inning. Griffey hit a two-run jack an inning later. Norman tossed a complete game in the 8-1 win. There was a long way to go, but winning this series was at least a start.

The Reds built on that momentum and won 9 of 13 to lead into a series with the Philadelphia Phillies that started on June 13. The Phils were headed for the NL East title. And three exciting nights of baseball at old Riverfront Stadium ensued.

Driessen won Monday night's game with a walkoff solo home run that broke a 4-4 tie. On Tuesday, Bench homered, Norman went the distance and Cincy won a tight 3-2 affair.

Wednesday would be the big day. June 15 was the trade deadline in this era and the Reds front office went for it. They packaged up four players, none of whom they would miss, and sent them to the New York Mets. In return, they got back Tom Seaver. The future Hall of Fame pitcher was 33-years-old, but was still pitching well at this stage in his career.

In that night's finale with the Phillies, the Reds trailed 7-2 in the seventh inning. They rallied for four runs thanks to consecutive two-RBI hits from Foster and Bench. Down to their last out in the ninth, Foster homered to tie it 7-7. In the 10th inning, with two outs, Bob Bailey singled and stole second base. Bailey scored on Rose's single.

Cincinnati had a stunning 8-7 win. They had swept a good team. They had big-time help on the way for the rotation. And they had the Dodger lead down to a manageable seven games. It was time for the Big Red Machine to make its move.

But the Reds played sluggish baseball, going 10-8 in the games immediately following the Seaver deal. They lost 7 of their last 13 before the break. The good news was that Los Angeles slowed a bit too, so Cincinnati's 48-41 record still had them within 9 ½ games.

Seaver pitched well for Cincinnati, going 14-3 with a 2.34 ERA in his twenty starts after the trade. But he and Norman were still lonely warriors on the staff. The Reds didn't win a series between the All-Star break and the end of July and fell 14 games back.

August got off to a good start. On Monday Night Baseball—then one of the sport's pre-eminent showcases—Foster hit two home runs to lead a win over the contending Chicago Cubs. Cincinnati won that series and it started an August where they went 21-11. But a four-game



series with the Dodgers was a missed opportunity, ending in a split. And in any case, the calendar was making the division deficit unmanageable.

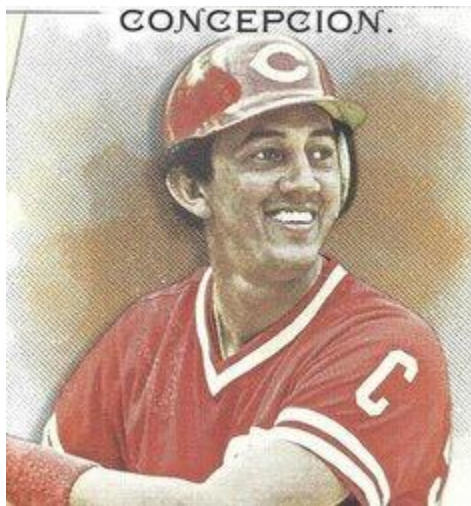
Cincinnati was still 10 ½ games back on Labor Day, even after the strong run through August. They were never able to make it a real race. They won four of five over L.A. in September, but it was far too little and way too late. The Reds otherwise meandered through the final month and finished with a final record of 88-74.

By the standards of today, they were fourth-best in the National League and 11th-best in MLB overall. It would have been a playoff season by our own era's more lenient standards. But it was still a sharp drop off from where they had so recently been.

## 1978

The 1978 Cincinnati Reds were another good team, but when they too came up short, the organization changed course and started a new era.

Cincinnati was led by their offense in 1978 and that offense was keyed by the greatness of Foster. The left fielder followed up his MVP campaign of 1977 by hitting 40 home runs and driving in 120 runs. Rose was 37-years-old, but the third baseman could still produce. He batted .302 and tied a National League record with a 44-game hitting streak in the summer of '78.



Bench was still behind the plate and still producing, hitting 23 homers. Concepcion hit .301. Griffey played rightfield and while he didn't have a vintage year, his .344 on-base percentage and .417 slugging percentage were still respectable. The right side of the infield didn't have much power, but Driessen and Morgan each had OBPs on the high side of .340.

It added up to an offense that finished second in the National League in runs scored. But the Reds were held back by their pitching staff. Seaver won 16 games with a 2.88 ERA and he went to the mound 36 times in 1978. But after Tom Terrific, Cincy pitching was thin.

Norman was respectable, but his 3.70 ERA wasn't suitable for a #2 starter on a team that had World Series aspirations. Norman was the only starter besides Seaver to go the post 30-plus times. Paul Moskau and Bill Bonham were similarly manageable, but not great.

The spotty rotation had been something that manager Sparky Anderson was able to maneuver around during the championship years. But that was when the bullpen was deep. Now it was similar to the rotation—one good arm followed by mediocrity. Doug Bair saved 28 games with a 1.97 ERA, but everyone after him, from Tom Hume to Manny Sarmiento to Borbon to Dave Tomlin, struggled through mediocre seasons.

Cincinnati opened the year with a four-game sweep of the mediocre Houston Astros, averaging nearly seven runs a game in the process. It kickstarted a strong opening push to the season that included Rose getting his 3,000th career hit in early May. By Memorial Day, the Reds were 28-18 and squarely in the middle of the race for the old NL West.

The Reds faced their first real test of the pennant race in late June and early July, with a 21-game stretch that was heavy on the Dodgers and Giants with a little bit of Astros sprinkled in.

The test did not go well and Cincy lost 12 of the 21 games. Their potent offense failed them, being shut out four times in this stretch and averaging only 3.4 runs per game (compared to 4.55 in all other games).

There was one notable exception to the struggling Reds offense. On June 14, Rose had a pair of hits against the Chicago Cubs. No one knew it at the time, but it was the start of a streak that would soon get national attention. Before the summer was out, Pete Rose would make a run at one of the game's most hallowed records—Joe DiMaggio's legendary 56-game hitting streak from 1941.

In the meantime, the Reds were 49-37 at the All-Star break, and in third place, but still within three games of the lead. The start to the second half went much better. Playing against NL East teams, the Reds went 16-9, including taking five of seven games from eventual NL East champ Philadelphia. Cincinnati was in a dead heat with San Francisco, with Los Angeles now chasing at 2 ½ games back.

Rose's hitting streak would drive all the way through July. It would reach 44 games and tie the National League record set by Wee Willie Keeler all the way back in 1896. But Pete would fall short of Joe D. On August 1 in Atlanta, he was held hitless. The streak was over.

And through it all, the rest of the Reds struggled after the break. An 11-game road trip to San Diego and Chicago, both mediocre teams, along with a contending one in Pittsburgh, resulted in a 4-7 record. The Reds again slipped three games off the pace. They needed to get back on their feet and an eight-game homestand against the Cardinals, Cubs and Pirates appeared just what the doctor ordered. St. Louis, like Chicago, was not particularly good in 1978.

The homestand started on Monday, August 21 and Bonham was rocked by the Cardinal offense in a 14-9 loss. Seaver was brilliant the next night and handed a 4-0 lead over to the bullpen in the ninth. Hume coughed it up and the Cards tied the game. Even though the Reds won 5-4 in 11, the victory didn't inspire confidence.

And it would be their last win of the homestand. Cincinnati lost the finale against St. Louis. The Reds lost the opener to Chicago 5-2, mustering only five hits. The Cincy bullpen blew another game the next night, being given a 4-2 lead in the eighth and losing 8-6. Even Seaver struggled in the finale, although with the Reds only getting four hits in the 7-1 loss, it really didn't matter.

The offensive woes continued against the Pirates. Cincinnati got just six hits and scored only one run in the two games combined, losing both. By the time this homestand was over, the Reds were seven games out of first place.

They never got back into serious contention. Even though San Francisco also fell hard, Los Angeles pulled away and had the division clinched before the final week began. The Reds

swept the Dodgers in that final week and also swept the Braves to finish within 2 ½ games in the final standings. But there was no pennant race drama.

It was still a 92-win season and by the standards of today, Cincinnati would have easily been a playoff team. In fact, they were equal to or better than division champions from Philadelphia and Kansas City.

But the changes came. Rose left via free agency and went to the Phillies. Anderson was fired and resumed his Hall of Fame managerial career in Detroit. 1978 was a seminal moment in the decline of one of the 1970s great baseball teams.

## 1979

The transition that had been slowly building was now going full-throttle. The 1979 Cincinnati Reds were able to win amidst the change, with new manager John McNamara and young third baseman Ray Knight helping lead the way to an NL West title.

Knight stepped into Rose's old position and hit .318, one key part of an offense that ranked third in the National League in runs scored. The Reds didn't hit a lot of home runs and they weren't even great in batting average, but they drew walks better than anyone, and hit the ball into the alleys at Riverfront Stadium.

Morgan, now 35-years-old at second base, was the perfect example. The future Hall of Famer only hit .250, but in drawing 93 walks, his OBP was a solid .379. Bench had a strong year behind the plate at age 31, a .364 OBP/.459 slugging percentage.

Foster hit 30 home runs. Griffey was still productive, at .374/.471. A key role player was backup outfielder Dave Collins, who came off the bench to put up a .364 OBP and provide a basestealing threat.

The pitching was pretty good too, ranking fourth in the NL in ERA. Seaver was 34-years-old and still getting it done, winning 16 games, working 215 innings and posting a 3.14 ERA. Mike LaCoss, Norman, Bonham and Moskau all had ERAs in the 3s, filling out a rotation that was not spectacular, but steady.

The bullpen was built around Tom Hume, whose versatility made a big difference all year. Hume made 35 relief appearances, 12 starts, and turned those into 17 saves, 10 wins and a 2.76 ERA. He got help from Frank Pastore, who also turned in some key starts, and Bair, who saved 16 games, albeit with a 4.29 ERA.

Cincinnati started the season playing consistently and they were 25-20 on Memorial Day, amidst a packed NL West with the Houston Astros, San Francisco Giants and the two-time defending pennant winning Los Angeles Dodgers.

It was the Astros who made the strong move coming out of Memorial Day. They beat the Reds three straight in Houston out of the holiday weekend, then took a later series in June. Over the Fourth of July, Cincinnati again lost two straight to the Astros, by the midsummer, Houston was soaring, ten games ahead.

On July 5 the season finally started to slowly turn back in Cincinnati's favor. Seaver took the mound against Houston ace J.R. Richard, a matchup we had not seen the last of. The top of the Cincy order chipped away at Richard. Griffey and Cesar Geronimo each had three hits, while

Morgan drew four walks. The 5-4 win stopped the bleeding and over the next two weeks leading up to the All-Star break, Cincinnati chopped the Houston lead down to a manageable six and a half games.

Cincinnati picked up the pace out of the break, winning 10 of 15, including a three-game sweep of the Pittsburgh Pirates. The Reds then went 19-7 in the month of August. Even with no head-to-head games against Houston, Cincinnati obliterated the division lead, spent a handful of days in first place and were within a half-game of the Astros on Labor Day, with a 77-60 record.

The lead was still Houston by a half on September 11, when the Reds and Astros met at Riverfront for a two-game set. Seaver and Richard each got the ball for the opener, although this time, neither had it. The Astros led 7-6 in the seventh, when light-hitting shortstop Dave Concepcion hit a two-run homer for the Reds. Foster followed with another blast. The Reds hung on to win 9-8.

One night later Collings and Knight each had three hits, and both offenses got on the board early. Pastore came out of the bullpen and delivered 3.1 innings of one-hit ball, the first time a pitcher had settled things down in this series. Cincinnati won 7-4 and had a 1 ½ game lead.

Ten days later it was the penultimate weekend of the season. The Reds had upped the lead to 2 ½ games and were in Houston for a three-game set.

Friday night was another Seaver-Richard battle. Knight got to the Houston ace for a two-run shot early, but Richard settled down. Seaver pitched well, but the Astros chipped out two runs and both aces were gone as the game went extras, tied 2-2. Houston won it in the 13th.

Tensions grew higher for Reds fans on Saturday. They got a run in the first inning, but did not score again in a 4-1 loss. Cincy loaded the bases in the seventh with no outs, but failed to score, as three consecutive pinch-hitters were unable to do the job. Sunday's finale would be a game for first place.

Pastore got the ball and delivered. He went the distance, scattered nine hits and gave up only one run. Foster homered early, Knight had three hits and five-run fourth inning gave Cincinnati an easy 7-1 win. They still had the NL West lead, but at 1 ½ games, with a week left, it wasn't time to celebrate just yet.

The time to celebrate came the following Friday. Cincinnati was able to push their lead back to 2 ½ games, and they controlled the half-game in the event that makeup games were required on the following Monday. Pastore ensured that wouldn't be necessary. He tossed a four-hit shutout against the Atlanta Braves for the home fans, and the party could start in Riverfront.

## 1979 NLCS

It was a reunion of sorts. The Pirates, after a three-year absence from the playoffs, had returned to the top of the NL East. For the fourth time this decade, it was Cincinnati and Pittsburgh for the National League pennant.

The series opened at Riverfront. Pittsburgh sent 25-year-old lefty John Candelaria to the mound to face Seaver.

Bench tripled for the Reds in the bottom of the second with one out, but Knight and Driessen failed to pick him up. It would be the Pirates who struck first in the top of the third, with a solo homer by Phil Garner, then a one-out triple from Omar Moreno, followed by a sac fly from Tim Foli. The Pirates had a 2-0 lead.

Cincinnati showed their own muscle in the fourth when Concepcion singled, and Foster tied the game with a two-run homer. The pitching took over, the starters gave way to the bullpens and the game went to the 11th inning still tied 2-2.

Foli led off the top of the 11th with a single off of Cincinnati's Tom Hume, who had been in since the ninth. Dave Parker then singled. Willie Stargell then delivered the big blow, a home run to put Pittsburgh up 5-2.

Cincinnati tried to rally with two outs in their own half of the 11th. Concepcion singled and Foster worked a walk. Pittsburgh summoned righthander Don Robinson to replace lefty Grant Jackson, with righty hitters Bench and Knight coming up. Bench walked, but Knight struck out to end the game.

The teams came right back the following afternoon and the tense games continued. Each team turned to a pitcher who had split time between the bullpen and rotation, Jim Bibby for Pittsburgh and Pastore for Cincinnati. The Reds got on the board first, with Pastore helping himself, delivering a sac fly following hits by Driessen and Knight.

Pittsburgh tied the game in the fourth with consecutive singles by Foli, Parker and Stargell to start the inning. But Stargell was thrown out on the bases and an inning that might have been big, ended with the score still tied 1-1. The Pirates got the lead in the fifth when Garner singled to start the inning and Foli drilled a two-out double.

The Reds didn't rally until the eighth, when they loaded the bases with two outs against Pirate closer Kent Tekulve. Knight flied to center. In the ninth though, the Reds broke through. With one out, Hector Cruz pinch-hit for Hume and singled. Collins doubled him in to tie the game. Concepcion and Foster missed chances to end it right here and for the second time in less than 24 hours, we were going extra innings.

Bair was on for the Reds, and Moreno started the Pittsburgh tenth with a single. He was bunted over and Parker drove him in. The Reds went quietly in the 10th, with Knight again making the last out. The NLCS just wasn't going the young third baseman's way.

After a day off, the teams resumed play in Pittsburgh, but it was all over but the shouting. Moreno got it started quickly against LaCoss, drawing a walk, stealing second and scoring a sac fly from Parker. The Pirates got another run in the second when Garner tripled and scored on a sac fly from Foli.

Stargell homered to start the third and Madlock went deep later in the inning. The barrage continued in the fourth when Pirate starter Bert Blyleven singled, as did Parker and Stargell pulled a two-out double down the right field line. It was 6-0, and other than a solo home run by Bench, the Reds went quietly in a 7-1 final.

The selection of NLCS MVP was easy—Stargell was 5-for-11, he drew three walks, hit two home runs and had six RBIs. That included the biggest hit of the series, the three-run blast that won Game 1. Honorable mention goes to Garner, who was 5-for-12, and Parker's 4-for-12 showing, including the winning hit of Game 2.



## 1980

The 1980 Cincinnati Reds said goodbye to another big part of the great Big Red Machine that had been dominant in the 1970s. Joe Morgan departed. The '80 Reds were still a good team and still contended to the last week of the season, but this proved to be one departure too many.

Cincinnati also parted ways with Fred Norman. Not nearly as big a name as Morgan, but it was a blow to a pitching staff that had little margin for error and would hold the Reds back in this 1980 season.

Pastore was a solid young arm who went 13-7 with a 3.27 ERA. Seaver was a reliable veteran arm, winning ten games with a 3.64 ERA. Charlie Leibrandt and LaCoss were each functionable, with ten wins and ERAs in the 4s. Mario Soto was a rising young talent that did spot starts and worked out of the bullpen, posting a 3.07 ERA. Hume was a respectable closer with a 2.56 ERA and 25 saves.

But with Seaver not having a vintage year, there was no ace. There were continuity problems, with no one making 30 starts for the year. And there was little depth in the bullpen. The Reds finished ninth in the 12-team National League for staff ERA. If they were going to win games, they would have to hit.

Fortunately, they had some great players who could do just that. Bench was still behind the plate and at age 32, he slugged .483 with 24 homers. Collins, a speedy centerfielder, posted a .366 on-base percentage and stole 79 bases. Griffey finished with a stat line of .364 OBP/.454 slugging. Driessen's OBP was .377 at first base. Cincinnati could hit the ball in the gaps and was third in the National League in doubles.

Everything in this offense ultimately came back to George Foster. The left fielder was one of the most feared hitters in the National League. And while he didn't have a spectacular year, no one was going to turn away his .362/.473 stat line, his 25 homers or his 93 RBI. The Reds scored the third-most runs in the National League.

Cincinnati came blazing out of the gate with a 12-2 record against a schedule that featured a steady diet of the lowly Atlanta Braves. Then the Reds lost six of their next ten. The early season was marked by more up and downs, with a four-game win streak and a four-game losing streak. By Memorial Day the record was 22-18.

At the Memorial Day turn it was the Dodgers who were in first place. The Reds were three games back, with the Astros and Padres each 3 ½ back.

Los Angeles was in town for a Memorial Day doubleheader. Seaver lost the opener 4-0, only getting four hits worth of support. But Cincinnati won the nightcap 5-4 thanks to a grand slam from Foster in the fifth inning. Foster homered again in the Tuesday night series finale, Griffey hit a three-run jack and the Reds took the series with a 6-1 win.

Cincinnati made a return visit to Dodger Stadium in early June. Doug Bair had a rough time of it on Friday and Saturday. The reliever gave up a tiebreaking walkoff home run in the series opener. On Saturday, trailing just 2-1 in the eighth, Bair coughed up three insurance runs. The Reds salvaged the finale on Sunday 5-4 behind three hits and a home run from Knight.

Cincinnati was spotty for the rest of June and came into the Fourth of July weekend against Houston with a record of 38-37. The Astros—who had signed Morgan—and the Dodgers had emerged as the top two teams in the division and this four-game weekend set would take us into the All-Star break.

The Reds needed to plant their feet and not let the season get away. That's what they did. They beat up Nolan Ryan in an 8-1 win on Friday. In the first game of Saturday's doubleheader, Cincinnati spotted Houston a 6-0 lead in the first inning. Soto came out of the bullpen and threw 8 2/3 innings of shutout baseball. The Reds came back and won 8-6. LaCoss won the nightcap 3-2.

Even though Cincinnati lost the Sunday finale, they had stopped the bleeding. They were 41-38 at the break, and within 4 1/2 of Houston and LA, who were tied for the lead.

Getting swept four straight at home by mediocre San Francisco didn't exactly create a run on playoff optimism in southwestern Ohio. But the always up-and-down Reds bounced back with eight wins in ten games. And they found their rhythm in August, going 18-10 and fighting the Dodgers to another split in a six-game home-and-home sequence.

By Labor Day, Cincinnati was 71-59 and firmly in the race. They were three back of frontrunning Houston. Los Angeles was nestled in between, a game off the pace. The race was on.

The Reds missed an opportunity when they lost four of seven in road trips to St. Louis and Chicago, both poor teams, and slipped five back. Cincinnati responded by sweeping Atlanta, pulling back within 2 1/2 games and welcoming Los Angeles back to Riverfront a weekend series.

The reliable Cincy offense fell silent at a bad time. They mustered only four hits in Friday's 5-2 loss. They had a 2-1 lead in the ninth inning on Saturday. Soto was on the mound with two outs and a man aboard. He gave up a triple to tie the game and balked in the winning run. The Reds lost 3-2. Then they only got five hits in Sunday's 3-1 loss.

That made the road trip to Los Angeles the following weekend even more must-win. And did the offense ever take a measure of revenge.

Cincinnati unloaded for seven runs in the second inning of Friday's opener, including a grand slam from Bench. They won 10-7. The Reds got started in the first inning on Saturday, scoring seven more runs. This time it was done in bits and pieces, with Knight's two-run double being the only extra-base hit. On Sunday, the Cincy offense waited until the 11th inning in a 2-2 game to unload. More small ball produced five runs, all on singles.

The sweep kept the Reds alive, with a record of 82-68, 3 ½ back. Now they had to go to Houston and keep it going.

But the bats again went quiet. Cincinnati wasted good outings from Seaver and Soto in consecutive 2-0 losses. An 8-5 win in the series finale kept them alive, but the schedule now worked against the Reds.

Cincinnati was 86-71, 3 ½ back of Houston, with LA in between at two games back. That's a tough climb to make in a week in any circumstances. It's even harder when there are two teams to catch. And it rises to nearly impossible when the two teams ahead of you are going to play head-to-head on the final weekend.

The Reds had to draw an inside straight and didn't. They split a couple games with the Padres and were formally eliminated when the Astros and Dodgers began their final showdown on Friday night.

Cincinnati still finished with a record of 89-73, fifth-best in the National League and good enough for the second wild-card spot by the standards of today. Not bad for a franchise in the midst of transition.

## 1981: When Being The Best Wasn't Enough

Major league baseball endured a strange year in 1981, a season that was torn apart by a strike that started in mid-June and lasted for two months. The result was any number of inequities and historical oddities. But none more so than the fact that the team who won more games than anyone—the 1981 Cincinnati Reds—were left home in October.

There was one major transition taking place. Bench was seeing his knees start to fail and he began splitting time at first base with Driessen. The Reds gave catching starts to Joe Nolan and the young lefthanded hitting Nolan was up to the task, batting .309.

Griffey was another .300 hitter at the age of 31. Now he roamed centerfield, in the place of the departed Cesar Geronimo. Griffey's spot in right was taken by Collins finished with an on-base percentage of .355 and his 26 steals made him the team's one speed threat on the bases.

Bench might have changed positions and seen his playing time cut in half, but he continued to produce, finishing with a stat line of .369 on-base percentage/.489 slugging percentage. Ron Oester was at second base and posted a respectable .342 OBP.

All of these players were important, but the reason the Reds offense ultimately ranked second in the National League in runs scored comes back to one man— Foster. With an MVP award already under his belt from 1977, and one of the great power hitters of the era, Foster played all 108 games and hit 22 more homers. He drove in 90 runs. His stat line was .373/.591 and he finished third in the 1981 NL MVP voting.

The starting rotation was keyed by the 1-2 punch of young Soto and veteran Seaver. Soto went 12-9 with a 3.29 ERA. Seaver was brilliant, going 14-2 and posting a 2.54 ERA.

But the pitching behind Soto and Seaver was problematic. Pastore and Bruce Berenyi were respectable in the rotation, but the bullpen was a weak point. Particularly its depth and it is absolutely fair to wonder how much the shortened season and the two-month vacation in the middle helped McNamara cover up this problem.

Cincinnati played well for the first two months of the season. Their 27-20 record on Memorial Day pro-rated out to a 93-win season—more or less on target for what they had been for four years. But the Los Angeles Dodgers were hot out of the gate at 33-15. The Dodgers were an NL West rival in the divisional format that existed prior to 1994. And the playoff format allowed for only division winners to reach the postseason.

The Reds responded by heating up when the calendar flipped to June. They won eight of nine, while the Dodgers started losing. Cincinnati's record was 35-21 and they were even in the loss column with 36-21 Los Angeles.

Then the strike hit. When it was resolved later in the summer, MLB had a decision to make for how they would handle the rest of the season.

Commissioner Bowie Kuhn made the decision to declare the teams in first place at the time of the strike to be "first half champions." All teams would start fresh and play out of the rest of the schedule to determine the "second half champion."

The winners of each half would then play each other best-of-five to decide who went to the League Championship Series. It was the first appearance of the Division Series, a round that would become permanent 13 years later.

One question you might ask is this—what happens if the same team wins both halves? In that case, the team that finished second in the second half would get the Division Series spot.

The biggest problem with this idea is that it meant the Dodgers (along with the Yankees, A's and Phillies, the other first-half winners) had nothing to play for except the possibility of one extra home game in the LDS. Los Angeles spent the balance of the schedule playing exactly like a team with nothing on the line and they never made a push at the second-half title.

The Reds had two other problems. The biggest being that they were denied the first-half title solely on the basis of playing one fewer game than the Dodgers. The second is that in the event LA had won the second half, Cincinnati's second-place finish from the first half was completely dismissed.

Play resumed on August 12 and for roughly a month, the Reds were mediocre. They were 13-13 on September 9 when three dramatic finishes changed their season and their place in history.

In a Wednesday afternoon getaway game at home with the San Diego Padres, the Reds trailed 4-2 in the ninth. Three singles and a walk tied the game and another single from Bench won it. The Dodgers came to town for the weekend. Oester broke a 2-2 tie in the 10th with a walkoff home run.

On Saturday, after Hume coughed up a 5-4 lead in the ninth and the game went extra innings, the Reds did it again. Driessen led off the 11th with a single. Reserve outfielder Paul Householder beat out a bunt. A passed ball moved both runners up and Dave Concepcion won it with a sac fly.

Those three games jumpstarted a 15-4 run that put Cincinnati right on the heels of first-place Houston in the season's final week. The Reds were within 1 ½ games and the Astros were coming to Riverfront for two on Wednesday and Thursday.

Soto got the ball in the Wednesday opener and delivered eight masterful innings of five-hit ball. The 5-2 win closed the margin to a half-game and made Thursday night a battle for first place.

Griffey, Concepcion and Knight all got two hits. But nobody could get the big hit with runners in scoring position. Houston starter Nolan Ryan kept turning the Reds back and they trailed 3-1 after eight innings. The Astros broke it open with five in the ninth and held their 1 ½ game lead.

Houston still had to visit Los Angeles to close the year and the Dodgers were trying to get some momentum for the postseason. Cincinnati was at home with lowly Atlanta. Alas, this would be a weekend of missed opportunity.

The Astros lost on Friday, but Pastore couldn't get out of the fourth inning and the Reds lost 11-5. Houston lost again on Saturday. But after Foster staked Cincy to an early lead with a three-run blast in the first, the bats fell silent and they lost 4-3. The race was over. Even though Soto would get the ball in the finale and pitch a shutout, it wouldn't matter.

Cincinnati's close second-place finish gave them an overall record of 66-42. With a .611 winning percentage, they were the only team to clear the .600 benchmark and were on a pace to win 99 games in a normal schedule.

So the question lingers—were the 1981 Cincinnati Reds robbed? The victim of bad luck? Or if you really want to be combative, were they the victim of good luck in that the Dodgers had no reason to compete in the second half, thus allowing this Reds' team to look better than they otherwise might have.

As with a lot of questions, there's a little bit of truth on all sides. Here's my thoughts, coming at it from each angle...

\*The Reds were the beneficiaries of good luck in that the lack of bullpen depth never got tested. Furthermore, the fact Los Angeles went on to win the World Series suggests the Dodgers would indeed have been significantly better if the rules of the second half had been different.

\*The Reds were robbed because of how the first half ended. No team should ever lose a title because of an unequal number of games played. Is it really asking too much that Cincinnati play one game against a random opponent to see if they can tie LA and force a playoff? Or just have the two teams play one game head-to-head?

\*Ultimately though, I come down on the bad luck side. Kuhn took a lot of heat for the inequities of the split-season. In the NL East, the St. Louis Cardinals had the best record, but finished

second in both halves. But the Commish had his back to the wall. He had to get people talking about baseball again and a fresh start was a logical way to do it.

The format that left the first-half winners unmotivated was an unfortunate side effect that tainted the second half results, but here again Kuhn's options were limited. The networks—ABC and NBC in this era—surely demanded a fixed number of playoff series. You couldn't give the first-half winners the chance to knock out the need for a Division Series.

So yes, there could have been some things done differently, but on balance, the 1981 Cincinnati Reds were just really good in the wrong year. And this was the end of an era. In the offseason, they let Collins walk in free agency. Griffey and Knight were traded. The big blow is that so was Foster. The Reds collapsed to 101 losses in 1982. 1981 was when an era, in slow decline over the last five years, finally came to an end.