

# Earl's Orioles: 1969-82

With a 1983 epilogue



## INTRODUCTION

The 1969 Baltimore Orioles came into the season just three years removed from winning the franchise's first World Series title in 1966, but still in the midst of change. Hank Bauer had managed the '66 champs. But after slipping under .500 in 1967, then being a middling 43-37 halfway through 1968, Bauer had been replaced by a young feisty skipper named Earl Weaver.

Under Earl, the Orioles went 48-34 down the stretch in '68. Even though they didn't come close to first place, they had momentum back. And excitement was alive again in Baltimore.

Earl Weaver's first full year was in 1969. His ensuing 14-year run in the dugout, through 1982, represents the glory years of baseball in Baltimore. The Orioles were a contender every single year Weaver was at the helm. They reached the World Series four times under his direction and won it once. And the team he put in place and left behind, won it all in 1983.

Through it all, Weaver became one of the most colorful figures in Major League Baseball, renowned for his battles with umpires. He was one of a kind and this compilation aims to capture his era in Baltimore.

All 15 seasons (Weaver's 14-year run, plus 1983) have individual articles published on TheSportsNotebook.com. Every postseason series, from the ALCS to the World Series, has a complete game-by-game narrative published online as well. This compilation pulls all of them together with modest editing done to eliminate obvious redundancies.

The most notable redundancies cut out are the explanations of very different rules and structure under which baseball was played during the Weaver era. To read through this period of Major League Baseball is to watch a sport undergoing profound changes.

Weaver's arrival coincided with a massive change. For the sport's entire existence, there had been no postseason rounds prior to the World Series. In 1969, as both the American and National Leagues expanded to 12 teams each, that would change. Each league would now have an East and a West Division.

The existence of a Central Division wouldn't happen until 1994, so Baltimore's AL East rivals included more than the usual suspects from New York and Boston. It also included the Detroit Tigers and Cleveland Indians. And it included the Milwaukee Brewers, who were an American League team prior to 1998. By the late 1970s, it also included the expansion Toronto Blue Jays. The existence of the Tampa Bay Rays was still light years in the future.

Not only were the divisions bigger, with 6-7 teams, but only the first-place teams advanced to the playoffs. It made for some great pennant races, of which you'll read about. But, as you'll also read about, it left some really good teams—including a few in this space—home for October.

In the early years of Earl's tenure, pitchers still batted for themselves. It was 1973, when the American League adopted the designated hitter. Homefield advantage in the postseason wasn't done on merit. A rotation system was used. Moreover, the LCS itself was only a best-of-five affair until 1985. The East and West took turns opening the League Championship Series round with two games at home, and with the venue then shifting for the final three games. The American League didn't even start picking an LCS MVP until 1980. In this compilation, we use that historical liberty to make retroactive selections.

The World Series had its familiar 2-3-2 homefield format, but the American League and National League simply took turns hosting. Prime-time postseason baseball was also just coming into its own. Not until 1971 was a World Series game played at night—the Orioles and Pittsburgh Pirates played that historic game. The LCS round was played entirely in the afternoon—including on weekdays—throughout Baltimore's era of dominance in the early 1970s. By the time they reached the postseason in 1979 and 1983, the lights could go on.

And, of course, the biggest change was the advent of free agency in the late 1970s, a change that shifted the power center away from the small markets—you'll see a lot of Baltimore, Oakland, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati in the first part of the decade—and to places like New York and Los Angeles. With all that said, let's get on with our narrative of Earl's Orioles.

## 1969

Pitching would be the foundation of Oriole success throughout Weaver's tenure. This inaugural 1969 edition set the tone by posting the best staff ERA in the American League. Dave McNally started 40 games, went 20-7 and finished with a 3.22 ERA. Jim Palmer was a 16-game winner with a 2.34 ERA. Tom Phoebus was a steady horse, making 33 starts, going 14-7 and an ERA that clocked in at 3.60.

In an era where starting pitchers logged a lot of innings, Weaver still had a deep bullpen to rely on. Eddie Watt saved 16 games, and his ERA was a dazzling 1.65. Dick Hall also had a sub-.2.00 ERA in his nearly sixty innings of work. Dave Leonhard gave Earl 94 innings and an ERA of 2.49. And Pete Richert saved 12 games and posted a 2.20 ERA.

All of this is excellent. But there was one more surprise piece to the puzzle. Baltimore made a five-player trade with the Houston Astros in the offseason. The players were generally non-descript. That includes a 31-year-old starting pitcher, Mike Cuellar, who had never really been noteworthy. Until he became an Oriole. In his new surroundings, all Cuellar did was rip off 23 wins, work 290 innings, finish with a 2.38 ERA and win the Cy Young Award.

A young everyday lineup had plenty of star talent. Boog Powell, the big first baseman, batted .304, hit 37 home runs and drove in 121 runs. Frank Robinson was in right field. He hit .308 and cleared the 30 HR/100 RBI thresholds himself. Boog and Frank finished 2-3 in the 1969 AL MVP voting.

Don Buford was consistently on base, and the left fielder finished with an OBP of .397. The middle infield tandem of Davey Johnson at second and Mark Belanger at short each had OBPs of .351 themselves. Elrod Hendrick's OBP was .333. Key reserves, Andy Etchebarren, who backed up Hendricks behind the plate, and Merv Rettenmund, who got time in the outfield, also got on base consistently.



Brooks Robinson (no relation to Frank, as a casual glance at a photograph will make plain) didn't have a vintage year, but the 32-year-old third baseman was still good for 23 home runs and solid defense. And speaking of defense, no one played it in the outfield like centerfielder Paul Blair. Baltimore was a complete team and they finished second in the American League for runs scored.

The Red Sox would emerge as a challenger in the AL East, and after a 4-2 start, Baltimore went up to Fenway for a four-game series. Monday afternoon's game started well enough, with Hendricks hitting an early three-run blast. But Cuellar didn't have his good stuff, was knocked out by the fourth, and the Orioles lost 5-3.

Tuesday afternoon saw a 5-5 tie going into the eighth inning. Richert was pitching brilliantly in relief, giving 3 1/3 innings of shutout ball, stabilizing a game where both offenses were hitting. In the top of the eighth, it paid off. Buford lashed a two-run single to get the lead, and Frank Robinson ripped a three-run bomb to blow it open. The game ended 10-5.

The bats on both sides kept hitting on Wednesday. Baltimore held a 7-6 lead in the top of the seventh. Five singles and two walks later, they were ahead 11-6 and won 11-8. Buford finished with three hits, four RBIs and a home run. Davey Johnson had a four-hit afternoon.

More of the same came in Thursday afternoon's finale. Three more hits for Buford. Four more for Davey. And a 9-5 win. After dropping the opener, and never really seeing their pitching get settled in, the Orioles had simply rolled up thirty runs in three games.

They kept right on winning. A four-game sweep at Yankee Stadium in early May, along with a pair of series wins over Minnesota, the eventual AL West champs. By Memorial Day, Baltimore's record was soaring at 32-13. But Boston was playing well themselves, hanging within 3 1/2 games. And no one was going to overlook Detroit, 7 1/2 games off the pace with plenty of time to turn it around.

The Orioles had a big 10-2 road trip from June 13 to 22 and expanded their lead to nine games. By June 27, their margin on the Tigers was out to 11 1/2 games. Detroit was coming into Baltimore for a four-game weekend set.

Blair wasn't known for his power, but his two-run blast set an early tone in Friday night's opener. McNally went the distance and won 4-1. On Saturday afternoon, trailing 4-2 in the sixth, a three-run homer from Hendricks keyed the rally to a 6-4 win.

Cuellar started the first game of an old-school Sunday doubleheader, where there would only be twenty minutes between games. He was brilliant and took a 2-0 lead in the ninth. But then it got away. Neither Cuellar, nor Watts, could prevent a three-run Tiger rally and a 3-2 loss. The second game was tied 3-3 after three innings. Earl called on Leonhard for some long relief. The result was 6 1/3 innings of shutout ball. The game stayed 3-3 into the bottom of the ninth. With two on and two out, Frank Robinson's RBI single won the game, and gave Baltimore three of four in the series.

The Orioles then took three of five in a home series with the Red Sox. Baltimore was in complete command of the race. Even though they lost three straight in Fenway to close the first half, the Orioles still reached the All-Star break with a record of 65-31 and an 11-game margin on both Boston and Detroit.

Any thoughts of a second half letdown were quickly dispelled when the Birds ripped off seven straight wins out of the break, and their lead grew to as many as 15 games. They would finally start to cool down on a West Coast road trip that saw five losses in seven games. But when Labor Day arrived, the Orioles were still 91-43. They were a comfortable 12 ½ games ahead of the Tigers. The Red Sox had finally fallen completely off the radar and were 19 ½ back.

It was a stress-free September and Baltimore got their magic number down to 1 by September 13, with 2 ½ weeks still left in the season. They were hosting Cleveland on a Saturday night with a chance to clinch. But they didn't even have to wait. An hour south down in Washington D.C., the Senators handed the Tigers a loss in the afternoon. The party could start early in Baltimore.

The Orioles concluded the season with a record of 109-53, 19 games clear of the rest of the AL East, and nine games better than anyone else in the major leagues. They were going into the postseason as the favorite to bring home a second World Series title in four years.

## 1969 ALCS

The rotation for this first year called for Baltimore to host the first two games, with Minnesota being at home for the balance of the series.

So, on a Saturday afternoon in old Memorial Stadium, the Orioles sent Cy Young Award winner Mike Cuellar to face Twins' ace Jim Perry. Both pitchers got settled in quickly and the first three innings of Game 1 passed by without a serious threat.

Frank Robinson delivered the first big offensive blow with a solo home run in the bottom of the fourth. But the Twins answered right back in the top of the fifth. Tony Oliva doubled to right. When Robinson made an error on the play, Oliva was able to take third. And thus, in position to score the tying run on a sac fly from Bob Allison.

Baltimore shortstop Mark Belanger wasn't known for his power, but he delivered a two-out, solo blast in the top of the fifth to put his team up 2-1. But in the top of the seventh, Oliva was again the one to answer. After a walk to American League MVP Harmon Killebrew, Oliva homered. The Twins had a 3-2 lead.

In the top of the ninth, Minnesota got a rally going when Cesar Tovar worked a leadoff walk and then stole second. Pete Richert came out of the Baltimore bullpen. The big guns of the Twins lineup had a chance to put them away. But Richert struck out Rod Carew. After intentionally walking Killebrew, Richert K'd Oliva. Then the reliever got Bob Allison. The game stayed 3-2.

Richert's heroics proved consequential when Boog Powell homered to lead off the bottom of the ninth and tie the game 3-3. Brooks Robinson then singled and took second on an outfield error. Ron Perranoski came out of the Minnesota bullpen. Carew, playing second base, committed an error, but Brooks Robinson was unable to advance to third. Still, there were runners on first and second and none out.

But now it was Perranoski's turn to do some heroic relief work. He got Davey Johnson to pop up, then retired Belanger and Merv Rettenmund. Extra innings awaited.

In the 11<sup>th</sup>, the Orioles got one-out singles from Powell and Brooks Robinson. Chico Salmon came off the bench to bat for Richert (there was no designated hitter until 1973). Salmon hit the ball hard, but he lined out to right and Perranoski got out of it.

The Twins threatened in the 12<sup>th</sup>, with a walk, a single, a wild pitch, and an intentional walk. Weaver lifted Marcelino Lopez and brought in Dick Hall. The latter struck out Leo Cardenas and killed the threat.

Baltimore got a soft rally going in the 12<sup>th</sup> that started when Belanger legged out an infield hit. Andy Etchebarren bunted him up to second. A groundout by Don Buford got Belanger over to third with two outs. Paul Blair was at the plate. He put down a bunt. And he beat it out. Ballgame. The first American League Championship Series game ever played had been an instant classic.

Both cities had contending NFL teams to keep track of on Sunday. The Baltimore Colts had lost a memorable Super Bowl the prior year, and the Minnesota Vikings would suffer a similar fate this year. The Colts and Vikings both won today, while their baseball counterparts battled it out in a game that, in an era where the NFL hadn't taken off yet, was by far the signature sporting event.

Dave McNally was pitching for the Orioles, facing off with the Twins' Dave Boswell. Baltimore threatened in the second. Powell and Brooks Robinson started the frame with singles. Davey Johnson put down what was supposed to be a sacrifice bunt, but he beat it out and loaded the bases.. But Boswell buckled down. He got Belanger to pop out. Etchebarren's fly ball to left was too shallow to score the run. And McNally struck out.

Minnesota threatened in the top of the fourth when Oliva singled, stole second and moved up to third on a fly ball. But with one out, Rich Reese popped up and the Twins failed to score.

McNally and Boswell were both dealing and starting rolling through each team's lineup. No one mustered so much as a threat until we were again in extra innings. The 10<sup>th</sup> passed without incident. So did the top of the 11<sup>th</sup>. Both starters were still in the game when Powell came to bat in the bottom of the 11<sup>th</sup>.

The big slugger worked a walk. Brooks Robinson got a bunt down to move the runner into scoring position. Davey Johnson was intentionally walked to put the double play back in order. Belanger missed another chance when he popped up. Reserve outfielder Curt Motton came to the plate. For the second straight afternoon, two-out heroics delivered the Orioles in extra innings. Motton singled to right. Baltimore had a 1-0 win, and a two-zip lead in the series.

There was no travel day, and there was also no night baseball in the postseason, so they were back at it on Monday afternoon in Minnesota's old Metropolitan Stadium. The Twins gave the ball to Bob Miller to try and keep their season alive. The Orioles turned to young Jim Palmer to try and win the pennant.

Buford and Blair began the game by beating out infield hits. In keeping with the tone of the series to date, a pitcher got out of it. Miller induced a groundout from Frank Robinson, and then a double play off the bat of Powell.

In the bottom of the first, Minnesota struck with two outs. Oliva continued his strong series with a double, and took third on a wild pitch. After Killebrew was intentionally walked, Reese knocked an RBI single. The Twins had given the fans reason to have hope.

But the Orioles wasted no time snuffing it out. Brooks Robinson opened the top of the second by doubling to left. Davey Johnson hit a fly ball to right that Oliva flubbed. There were now runners on the corners. Elrod Hendricks doubled in both runs and Baltimore had a 2-1 lead. After Belanger and Palmer were set down, Buford knocked a two-out RBI single to make it 3-1. Miller was gone.

The Birds had some momentum and they kept it going in the fourth. Belanger tripled to lead it off. After Palmer struck out and Buford worked a walk, Blair slashed a two-run double. It was 5-1, and for the first time in this series, a team could feel comfortable.

Minnesota got a run back in the bottom of the fifth when Killebrew doubled and Reese picked him up with an RBI single. But Baltimore got the run right back in the top of the sixth when Buford's one-out double was followed by singles from Blair and Frank Robinson. It was 6-2 and the Orioles had just twelve outs left to get.

Buford singled again in the top of the eighth. This time Blair followed him with a home run. It was 8-2, and it was all over but the shouting. For good measure, Baltimore tacked on three runs in the ninth, capped by a double from Blair.

Palmer had gone the distance. The future Hall of Fame pitcher faced another future Hall of Famer in Carew with two outs in the ninth. Carew grounded out to second and Baltimore had swept the first-ever American League Championship Series.



There were heroes aplenty for the victorious Birds. They were led by what might be called the Killer B's—Buford, Brooks, Blair, and Boog. Buford had gone 4-for-14 with three walks and set the table in some key rallies. Brooks had gone 7-for-14. Blair went 6-for-15 and drove in six runs. Boog went 5-for-13.

Who would you have taken for ALCS MVP? I'd go with Blair, thanks to the RBIs, and his big two-out bunt to win Game 1 really being the biggest single play of the series. A hat tip can also go to McNally, for his 11 scoreless innings to win Game 2.

Oliva had swung the bat well in defeat, going 5-for-13. But he was the only one. Carew's struggles were most notable, as he went 1-for-14. That also made it possible for Baltimore to pitch around Killebrew, issuing the big slugger six walks.

For Baltimore, it was on to the World Series.



## 1969 WORLD SERIES

The 1969 World Series between the Baltimore Orioles and New York Mets was a bit ironic. Just nine months earlier, these same two cities had met in Super Bowl III, when the then-Baltimore Colts met Joe Namath's Jets. In that Super Bowl, the heavily favored team from Baltimore was upset by New York. Now, in October, the same thing happened—the Mets upended the 109-win Orioles to win the Fall Classic.

The '69 World Series opened on October 11, a Saturday afternoon, in Baltimore's old Memorial Stadium. Both teams had the Cy Young Award winners at the top of their rotations, and with each coming off LCS sweeps, the Orioles' Mike Cuellar, and the Mets' Tom Seaver were ready to roll for Game 1.

Don Buford led off the home half of the first and greeted Seaver with a solo home run. The favored Birds had a quick 1-0 lead. In the bottom of the fourth, Baltimore's offense stirred again, this time with two outs. Elrod Hendricks singled. Davey Johnson drew a walk. Mark Belanger and Cuellar each singled, and it was 3-0. Buford ripped a double. Baltimore had a 4-0 lead.

Cuellar didn't run into any trouble until the top of the seventh. Donn Clendenon led off with a single, and then Ron Swoboda worked a walk. With one out, Jerry Grote singled to load up the bases and bring the tying run to the plate. Al Weis' sac fly put the Mets on the board, but Cuellar still got out of the jam with a 4-1 lead.

New York made one more rally in the ninth, getting two men aboard with two outs. Art Shamsky could tie the game with one swing. But Cuellar induced a ground ball to second base and the Orioles had Game 1.

Dave McNally took the ball for Baltimore in Sunday's Game 2, matched up with New York's Jerry Koosman. Both pitchers cruised through the first three innings. In the top of the fourth, Clendenon homered and the Mets had their first lead of the Series, 1-0.

Koosman took a no-hitter into the seventh, but McNally had kept pace after the solo blast and it was still 1-0. Paul Blair's leadoff single in the bottom of the seventh ended the no-hit bid. With two outs, Blair stole second. And when Brooks Robinson knocked an RBI single back through the box, the game was tied 1-1.

The 1-1 tie held until the ninth. With two outs and nothing happening, the New York bats came alive. Ed Charles, Grote, and Weis hit consecutive singles to get a 2-1 lead. The same thing almost happened for Baltimore in the bottom of the ninth. With two outs, Koosman walked two straight batters. He was removed for Ron Taylor. The reliever got Brooks Robinson on a ground ball to second.

It was a good sports Sunday for the fans of New York's "second" teams. The Mets were even up in the World Series and the Jets had knocked off the Cincinnati Bengals. The city of Baltimore licked their wounds over the baseball loss, and waited until Monday for some football redemption. The Colts' home game had to be pushed back to accommodate the World Series. So, while the baseball teams took a day off, Baltimore watched the Colts beat the Philadelphia Eagles.

Night baseball in the World Series was still a couple years away, so the Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday games at Shea Stadium were all afternoon affairs. Game 3 matched up the Orioles' Jim Palmer against the Mets' Gary Gentry.

New York's first home game started the same way Baltimore's had—the leadoff hitter for the home team hit a first-inning home run. This time, it was Tommie Agee giving the Mets a 1-0 lead.

In the bottom of the second, the Mets again started a rally with two outs. Grote walked and Bud Harrelson singled. Gentry helped himself with the bat doubling to right-center and putting New York up 3-0.

Baltimore got their first hit in the top of the fourth, and put two runners on with two outs. Hendricks came to the plate. He crushed a ball to deep left center that looked certain to clear the bases. Agee ran it down with a great backhanded catch. The 3-0 lead was preserved. The Mets later added a run in the sixth when Ken Boswell legged out an infield hit, and then scored on a double by Grote.

In the seventh, with two outs, Gentry lost it. He walked three straight batters. Nolan Ryan came out of the bullpen. Blair was at the plate. He hit the ball hard, a line drive into right center. Enter Agee. The Met centerfielder continued the game of his life with a diving catch. The shutout was preserved.

Ed Kranepool added one more run for the Mets with a solo homer in the eighth. Extending the lead to 5-0 proved significant when the Orioles were able to load the bases with two outs. Blair again had a chance to do some damage. This time, Ryan struck him out. New York had the Series lead, 2-1.

In an era when pitchers routinely worked on three days' rest, Cuellar and Seaver were back on the mound for Game 4. They would also likely be in line to pitch Game 7, if the Series got that far. Both were brilliant on this afternoon.

Clendenon got Seaver a lead with a solo home run in the bottom of the second. In the third inning, both pitchers maneuvered around trouble. Baltimore had runners on the corners with one out, but a Blair bunt didn't work in picking up the run. New York had two on with one out before Cuellar ended the rally.

Neither pitcher could be touched until the ninth inning, and the score was still 1-0. The Orioles came to the plate in a desperate spot.

With one out, Frank Robinson and Boog Powell singled. Brooks Robinson came to the plate. He hit a sinking line drive to right. The Mets' Ron Swoboda got in on the defensive heroics with a diving catch. Frank Robinson was able to tag up and tie the game, but Swoboda's gem ensured the game would stay tied 1-1.

Baltimore's ace closer, Eddie Watt, got into a little trouble in the bottom of the ninth, with men on first and third and two outs. He struck out Shamsky. Extra innings were at hand.

Shamsky had pinch-hit for Charles, the regular third baseman, who was then replaced by Wayne Garrett. The move threatened to blow up on the Mets. After not getting the hit they needed in the ninth, a Garrett error opened the top of the 10<sup>th</sup>. Baltimore would put two on with one out. But neither Blair nor Buford could get the key hit.

In the bottom of the 10<sup>th</sup>, Grote blooped a double giving New York an immediate threat. After an intentional walk, another top Oriole reliever, Pete Richert, came into the game. J.C. Martin, batting for Seaver, put a bunt down. Richert threw the ball away. Grote raced in with the winning run. New York had Game 4 by a 2-1 count. And they now, improbably, had this Fall Classic by a 3-1 count.

Koosman and McNally rematched in Game 5. Baltimore's back was to the wall, but just one win could turn some momentum, and they could get back home. And after a quiet first two innings both ways, the Orioles made some noise in the top of the third.

Belanger led off with a single. McNally delivered the goods with his bat—a two-run homer that gave Baltimore their first lead since Game 1. With two outs, Frank Robinson homered. It was 3-0.

McNally rolled through the first five innings. In the bottom of the sixth, controversy erupted. McNally's pitch to leadoff hitter Cleon Jones hit the dirt and went into the New York dugout. The Mets alleged that the ball hit Jones in the foot and showed the home plate umpire some shoe polish on the ball. It was enough to get Cleon awarded first base.

The legitimacy of the shoe polish remains a subject of historical intrigue, because it proved consequential. Clendenon followed it with another home run. In the bottom of the seventh, Weis hit a solo homer. It was 3-3, Baltimore had mustered just one hit since the third inning, and the momentum was all in New York's direction.

Watt was on in relief in the eighth. Cleon Jones again got things going and this time there were no arguments—it was a clean leadoff double. Clendenon grounded out, but Swoboda delivered a big two-bagger of his own. It was 4-3 and the Mets were three defensive outs from a championship. But some insurance doesn't hurt. With two outs, a ground ball to first base was misplayed by Boog Powell, then saw Powell's eventual throw to first dropped by Watt. Swoboda came all the way around on the double error.

At 5-3, Frank Robinson got a leadoff walk in the top of the ninth. The heavy hitters of the Baltimore lineup had a chance to tie it up. Koosman got Powell and Brooks Robinson. In what would prove to be a historical irony, it was Davey Johnson—who later managed the Mets' 1986 World Series champs—that was the last man at bat. He flew out to left and the party was on at old Shea Stadium.

Clendenon's three home runs—still tied for the most in a five-game Series—made him an easy choice as the 1969 World Series MVP. But he wasn't alone. Swoboda had gone 6-for-15, made a big defensive play and drove in the winning run of Game 5. Weis finished the Series 5-for-11, including the home run that tied up the fifth game.

The bigger story was what New York pitching had done. Baltimore's feared offense had mustered just 23 hits—less than five per game for the Series—and 19 of those hits were singles. The Orioles batted .146. Koosman, with his two wins, was the pitching star. It's a testament to Baltimore's own pitching that, with anemic production like that, three of their four losses were nail-biters

This Series is remembered as a big upset, but it does have to be remembered that New York was a 100-win team themselves, the second-best in baseball during the regular season. They had the 1-2 punch of Seaver-Koosman at the top of the rotation. The notion that they could win a best-of-seven Series doesn't seem like as big a stretch as the conventional historical narrative makes it out.

Baltimore would be back.

## 1970



The Orioles were out to finish the job in 1970 and that's exactly what they did. Baltimore was excellent in all phases of the game and in 1970, first baseman Boog Powell had a career year. A big muscular guy whose barbecue stand remains a popular fixture at Orioles' games to this day, Powell hit 35 home runs, drove in 114 runs and won the American League MVP award.

The two great Robinsons were still going strong. Frank and Brooks were on the wrong side of 30, but they put up numbers. Frank Robinson played right field, hit 25 homers and had an on-base percentage of .398. Brooks Robinson was at third base, popped 18 homers and drove in 94 runs. And he would shine in this season's biggest moments.

Davey Johnson, known to this generation for his long managerial career, was still a 27-year-old second baseman in 1970. Davey had a solid OBP of .360. Left fielder Don Buford was even better, with patience at the plate turning a .272 batting average into a .406 OBP.

Paul Blair was one of the great defensive center fielders of his era and he was respectable with the bat, posting a stat line of .344 OBP/.438 slugging percentage.

Merv Rettenmund was a fourth outfielder that Weaver found playing time for, and Rettenmund provided depth, with a .394/.544 stat line and 18 home runs in his role. All in all, Baltimore scored more runs than anyone in the American League in 1970.

The pitching was no less outstanding and three horses at the top of the rotation were the key reason. Dave McNally won 24 games with 3.22 ERA and 296 innings pitched. Mike Cuellar tacked on 24 more wins, a 3.48 ERA and logged 297 innings. And a 24-year-old Jim Palmer worked over 300 innings, and picked up 20 wins to go along with his 2.71 ERA.

All three pitchers finished in the top five of the American League Cy Young voting, with McNally coming in a close second. Collectively, they started 118 games.

When the Big Three weren't taking the ball, Jim Hardin and Tom Phoebus were providing solid work, combining for 40 starts and each with ERAs in the 3s. When the bullpen had to be called on, Pete Richert was the ace, saving 13 games and posting a 1.98 ERA. Eddie Watts saved 12 more with a 3.25 ERA. Dick Hall and Marcelino Lopez were effective in middle-to-long relief

Baltimore's pitching staff led the American League in composite ERA. When you score more runs than anyone and give up fewer, I daresay that's a pretty good formula for dominating the league.

Detroit was the prime challenger to Baltimore. The Tigers were just two years removed from winning the World Series and they ran a distant second place in '69. After the Orioles got the season off on the right foot by sweeping Cleveland three straight, they welcomed Detroit in for an early weekend set at old Memorial Stadium.

Friday night's opener went to extra innings tied 2-2. With two outs in the top of the 10th, Brooks Robinson lashed a two-out RBI single, his third hit of the night to get the win. On Saturday, McNally was pitching well, but the bats were quiet. Baltimore trailed 2-1 in the eighth. They promptly ripped off five hits, the biggest a single from Blair for the go-ahead RBI. A four-run rally keyed the 5-2 win.

Even though the Birds dropped Sunday's finale, with Cuellar getting roughed up in a 7-2 loss, the season was off to a good start. By Memorial Day, Baltimore was 29-13 and in first place. Detroit was nine games out. The New York Yankees were nestled in between, 5 ½ games off the pace.

The early part of the summer saw the Orioles slow down. They played mediocre baseball through June. The games were against either the AL West or non-contenders from the AL East, so they didn't pay too heavy a price in the standings. They went into the All-Star break by going 6-4 in a ten-game stretch against the Tigers and Yankees. Baltimore was 54-33 at the break, up six on Detroit, seven on New York, with the Boston Red Sox lingering nine games back.

The Orioles lost two of three to eventual AL West champ Minnesota right out of the break, and saw their lead shrink to a little as three games. The prospect of a real pennant race was looming. But Baltimore responded by winning nine of twelve against the AL West, while their rivals stumbled. The lead was extended back to 8 ½ games.

New York was now the closest challenger. The Birds were going to the Bronx for a three-game weekend series, a doubleheader on Saturday and one game on Sunday. It was the chance for either the Yanks to make this a race, or the Orioles to drive in the dagger.

Saturday afternoon's game was scoreless with two outs in the third. In short order, Brooks Robinson singled, Powell homered and Rettenmund homered. McNally had a 3-0 lead and he went the distance, scattering 11 hits and picking up the 4-2 win.

In the nightcap, Palmer took a 4-2 lead into the ninth. He got into trouble and handed a bases-loaded with two outs situation to Richert. The closer gave up a tying single to New York outfielder Roy White. White then won the game with a walkoff homer in the 11th. The series would come down to Sunday afternoon.

In a wild affair, Baltimore got four hits from Buford and three-run homer from reserve outfielder Terry Crowley. They took a 9-5 lead by the sixth inning. But the pitching was struggling and no one could stop the Yanks from pulling even 9-9 and forcing extra innings. At last, in the 11th, Frank Robinson got a rally started with a double to right. Blair and Brooks each put down bunts that they beat out for hits. The Birds got three runs and the 12-9 win closed out a needed series triumph .

That weekend in the Big Apple was the biggest part of a 22-8 run through the month of August. By Labor Day, Baltimore was soaring at 89-50. They were ten games up on New York, with Detroit and Boston even further in the rearview mirror. The Orioles would coast through September, finishing 108-54 and fifteen games clear of the field.

The only downside was a cosmetic one—their clinching with two weeks to go came by watching a Yankee loss, rather than getting a moment of on-field celebration. But the AL East clinching wasn't the celebration anyone in Baltimore was really after.

## 1970 ALCS

A familiar foe awaited—the Twins were also back in the postseason. The series would open with two games at Minnesota's Metropolitan Stadium, then go east to Baltimore's Memorial Stadium for all remaining games.

So on Saturday afternoon at the Old Met, the Orioles and Twins got down to business and the home team wasted no time in going to work. Cesar Tovar singled, was bunted up to second and scored on a single by the great Harmon Killebrew. It was 1-0 Twins in the first inning and might have been worse, but Tony Oliva's two-out line drive wound up in the glove of Baltimore center fielder Paul Blair.

Baltimore then bounced right back at the plate. Elrod Hendricks and Brooks Robinson singled, and Davey Johnson was hit by a pitch. The bases were loaded with one out. Minnesota starter Jim Perry got a needed ground ball from Mark Belanger. But after the forceout at second, Twins' second baseman Danny Thompson threw it away on the turn. Instead of escaping the jam, Perry saw two runs score and the Birds grab the lead.

Thompson helped make some amends with his bat in the bottom of the inning, following a George Mitterwald single with a double and setting up second and third with one out. Perry came to the plate—the DH did not exist until 1973—and dropped down a bunt that picked up the tying run. It was 2-2, and neither starter—eventual Cy Young Award winner Perry or 20-game winner Cuellar—looked comfortable.

In the top of the fourth, Frank Robinson and Hendricks got the inning going with singles to right. With runners on the corners, Brooks Robinson's sac fly put Baltimore up 3-2. A Johnson single and infield hit from Belanger loaded up the bases. Cuellar came to the plate. It was an ideal spot for Perry to limit the damage. Instead, the Oriole pitcher blew this game open with a grand slam. It was 7-2 and before the inning was over, Baltimore added on. Don Buford and MVP first baseman Boog Powell each homered.

With a 9-2 lead, Cuellar should have been set to cruise home. Instead, the Twins rallied over the next two innings. Tovar knocked a two-out RBI single in the bottom of the fourth. Killebrew homered in the fifth. Mitterwald came up with a two-out RBI base hit of his own. Cuellar was not able to complete five innings and qualify for the win. It was 9-6 and we still had a ballgame on our hands.

Dick Hall, on in relief for Cuellar, batted for himself in the top of the sixth and singled. Buford worked a walk. Powell's RBI single extended the lead to 10-6. After another walk, the bases were loaded. But this rally ended when Hendricks' ground ball to first base turned into a 3-2-3 double play.



The double play kept the Twins in the game, but games like this swing on which team can find a reliever to settle things down. Hall was that man today. He pitched four innings of one-hit ball and the 10-6 score held to the end. Baltimore had ensured themselves a road split.

Minnesota turned to their own Hall—Tom Hall to try and even up the series on Sunday afternoon. But Tom Hall was erratic, walking Belanger and Blair to open the game, then giving up an RBI double to Powell. In the top of the third, a leadoff single from Belanger set up Frank Robinson's two-run blast. In the fourth, an infield hit and an error set up another Oriole pitcher to do the job with his bat. Dave McNally singled in the run. It was 4-0 and Tom Hall was headed for an early shower.

Like Cuellar before him, McNally struggled with an early lead. He walked Leo Cardenas. A free pass to a light-hitting shortstop who batted in front of Killebrew and Oliva was less than ideal. The big bats each homered and the Twins were back in the game, down 4-3 going into the fifth.

Baltimore threatened to blow it right back open in the top of the fifth, loading the bases with no one out. Stan Williams came out of the Minnesota bullpen. He got Brooks Robinson to pop out and Davey Johnson's fly ball was too shallow to score a run. Williams kept the score 4-3 and—at least temporarily—saved his team's season.

The Twins missed their own opportunity in the fifth inning's bottom half. With two on and one out, Cardenas singled to left. Williams came around third looking to score the tying run, but Oriole left fielder Merv Rettenmund threw him out at the plate and preserved the 4-3 lead.

Just like in the opener, both teams got pitching in the latter stages of the game and the 4-3 score held to the top of the ninth. McNally, still in the game, was allowed to bat for himself and got it rolling with a double to left. A Belanger single put runners on first and third. After Blair struck out, Frank Robinson worked a walk to load the bases.

Ron Perranoski, the Twins' ace reliever, had come in on the eighth and faced off with Powell. The MVP ripped a double to left, scored two runs and extended the lead to 6-3. Having taken out a little insurance, the Baltimore bats piled on. Rettenmund's single picked up another run. An error from Cardenas made it 8-3. Davey Johnson delivered the final blow with a three-run blast.

The Orioles had an 11-3 win. It was a much better game than the score makes it sound, but Baltimore was going back home needing just one win in three tries.

There was no travel day and night baseball was not yet a thing for League Championship Series play. So on Monday afternoon, the Birds sent Jim Palmer to the mound to try and secure the pennant. And the Baltimore bats wasted no time in chipping away at Jim Kaat.

Don Buford singled to left to start the home half of the first and was bunted up by Blair. Frank Robinson's fly ball moved Buford to right and Powell's single drove in the run. In the second inning, Palmer's fly ball to center was flubbed by Jim Holt and the Oriole pitcher ended up on second base. A Buford single picked up the run and made it 2-0.

Brooks Robinson led off the Baltimore third with a double. A single from Johnson put runners on the corners and got Kaat out of the game. Bert Blyleven came on, making him the third future Hall of Fame pitcher to work in this game. But the 19-year-old Blyleven couldn't stop the rally. A ground ball out picked up one run. Palmer continued the hitting display put on by Baltimore pitchers with an RBI double. Buford's big day continued with a sac fly.

It was 5-0, but Minnesota had shown a propensity to rally at this point in the game. They put two men on with none out in the fourth, but Palmer worked out of it. The Twins grabbed a run in the fifth and brought Killebrew to the plate with two men aboard. On a 1-2 count, Palmer got the great Minnesota slugger looking. The lead was still a comfortable 5-1.

A solo blast from Johnson extended the lead and Palmer cruised home. With a man on first and two outs in the ninth, the Twins set up pinch-hitter Rick Renick. Palmer induced a ground ball to short. Belanger flipped it to Johnson for the forceout at second and the party was on. Baltimore had won the American League pennant for the second straight season and the third time in five years.

The ALCS did not start giving out an MVP award until 1980. The best choice in 1970 would have been Powell. The big first baseman went 6-for-14 and drove in six runs. That included the double that broke open Game 2 and the big two-out RBI hit early in Game 3 that set the tone.

Brooks Robinson had an excellent ALCS, going 7-for-12. Other noteworthy performances included Belanger, who went 4-for-12 and Davey Johnson homered twice.

## 1970 WORLD SERIES

The Baltimore Orioles and Cincinnati Reds were far and away the best teams in baseball when they met at the 1970 World Series. The Orioles and Reds each won their division titles in a landslide. Both teams swept their way through the League Championship Series 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. Homefield advantage was done on a rotation basis and it was the National League's turn. So Cincinnati's brand-new 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. Bobby Tolan, the speedy center fielder who had been the hero of the NLCS, ripped a one-out double and then came around to score on a two-out hit from Johnny Bench. In the top of the third, Tolan walked and then scored when Lee May homered. The Reds had an early 3-0 lead.

Cincy starter Gary 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 Pete 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 Reds' manager Sparky Anderson's turn to go 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 shortstop Dave 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 bat work. He doubled to help set up a bases-loaded with two outs situation. McNally came to the plate. Facing a good Reds' reliever in Wayne 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 Lee 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 Cincinnati's Jim 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 Bernie 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

Baltimore's pitching staffs of this decade live on in baseball lore and no season stands out more than 1971. The four starters—Jim Palmer, Dave McNally, Mike Cuellar and Pat Dobson—were all 20-game winners. It was only the second time in baseball history that a quartet of starters all hit the 20-win threshold and it was also the most recent. Given the way the handling of pitchers has changed in the ensuing half-century, it's a pretty fair bet that the '71 Oriole rotation will be the last to pull off this amazing feat.

The rotation was also perfectly balanced. Palmer's ERA of 2.68 was the best, although McNally and Dobson were both under 3. Cuellar's ERA clocked in at 3.08. They combined to start 142 games. And to further underscore the strength of balance over a single ace, none of the rotation finished in the top three of the American League Cy Young voting.

There wasn't a lot of need for the bullpen, but when necessary, Eddie Watt did yeoman's work, with a 1.82 ERA in his 39 innings. But no true reliever worked more than 45 innings. Other pitchers, from Dick Hall to Tom Dukes to Pete Richert to Grant Jackson, filled out the starts not taken up by the Big Four and did modest relief work along with it.



Baltimore's staff ERA was the best in the American League. And it combined with an offense that was also the AL's best. Frank Robinson led the way. The right fielder finished with a stat line of .384 on-base percentage/.510 slugging percentage, ripped 28 homers and finished with 99 RBIs. Frank finished third in the AL MVP voting.

Brooks Robinson was 34-years-old at third base, but coming off his dominance in the 1970 World Series, he was still going strong. Brooks hit 20 homers, drove in 92 runs and was fourth in the final MVP results. On the other side of the infield, first baseman Boog Powell followed up his 1970 MVP campaign with 22 homers and 92 RBIs of his own. Don Buford played left field and he combined his dazzling .413 OBP with a solid .477 slugging percentage.

Davey Johnson, known to a future generation as a successful manager, was still in his prime at second base and put up a solid .351/.443 stat line. Mark Belanger was known for his great defense at shortstop, but with patience at the plate, he also posted a .365 OBP. Paul Blair in centerfield and Elrod Hendricks behind the plate rounded out a defense that excelled at the key up-the-middle spots.

Merv Rettenmund wasn't officially a starter, but manager Earl Weave got him starter's at-bats. With a .422/.448 stat line it's not hard to see why. And with depth like this, it's not hard to see why Baltimore racked up runs.

The Orioles came firing out of the gates and won eight of the first ten, including taking a series from AL East hopeful Detroit. But two straight losses to the Tigers in the rematch triggered a descent into some sluggish play. Baltimore went 13-10 over their next 23 games. By Memorial Day, the Oriole record was solid, at 26-18. But they were 2 ½ games back of the Boston Red Sox, with Detroit four off the pace.

Baltimore re-established their footing in the early part of summer, taking advantage of a soft part of the schedule to go 18-5 and surge into first place by a comfortable seven games. They went to Fenway Park for a four-game set that offered an opportunity to put an even firmer grasp on control of the division.

But after taking the Friday night opener 7-3, the Birds were swept in a Saturday doubleheader and lost again on Sunday. They scored just five runs in those three losses. A return home to face Detroit resulted in a 15-6 loss, before Baltimore recovered and won the next night to salvage a split of the two-game set.

The AL East lead was down to four games and then shrunk to 2 ½ by Fourth of July Weekend. The Red Sox were the prime challenger, with the Tigers six off the pace. Baltimore went to Detroit for a key series on the holiday weekend.

It didn't start well. The Oriole bats could only muster five hits off Tiger ace Mickey Lolich and wasted a good outing from McNally in a 3-1 loss. It was Blair, known far more for his glove than his bat, who turned around the attack on Saturday. Blair doubled twice, drove in four runs and keyed an 8-1 win that stopped the bleeding.

In Sunday's rubber match on the Fourth, Powell hit a two-run homer in the first. Cuellar grinded out a complete-game 3-2 win. Baltimore was back on their feet and closed the first half by winning six of eight. At the All-Star break, the lead was back up to 5 ½ over Boston and 8 over Detroit.

The roller-coaster continued after the break though, with the Orioles going 5-6 and seeing the Red Sox creep to within 2 ½ games. In late July, Baltimore hosted Oakland for a big series. The A's were running away with the AL West, so for them this was a possible preview of the ALCS. For the Orioles, it was a big series in a tight pennant race.

Dobson took the ball in the opener of a Tuesday night doubleheader and was brilliant, tossing a four-hitter and outdueling Oakland's Catfish Hunter for a 1-0 win. In the nightcap, the bats stepped up. Powell had three hits, Rettenmund drove in a couple runs and Baltimore took an early 4-0 lead. Grant Jackson, on the mound, faltered and the A's rallied late to tie it 4-4.



Oakland had bullpen ace Rollie Fingers in the game. With two outs in the bottom of the ninth, Powell doubled, Brooks homered and Baltimore had the doubleheader sweep. In Wednesday night's finale, it looked like a good night from Cuellar would be wasted. The Orioles trailed 2-0 in the ninth inning. Base hits from Buford and Rettenmund brought Fingers in. And the Birds beat the future Hall of Famer for the second straight night. This time it was Frank Robinson going deep for the 3-2 win.

Over the weekend, a good Kansas City Royals team came in. Palmer and Dobson tossed shutouts and the lead was back to 6 ½ games. Now, it was time for Baltimore to put this race to bed, right? Not quite yet. The Orioles lost four of six to Boston and New York. Baltimore was still up 4 ½ games, but there was a big series in Fenway at the end of August that could still swing the pendulum the other way.

But the heat of August favors teams with good pitching, and Baltimore never let it come to that. They took advantage of another soft schedule stretch to go 14-5. Boston slumped. By the time the Orioles went to Fenway, their division lead was soaring at 11 ½ games.

Baltimore still had a mid-September slump, primarily against Detroit, and the lead shrunk to 5 ½ games. But there were only 11 to play by that point—and the Oriole response was to close the season with eleven straight victories.

The clinching moment came in Yankee Stadium on September 22. On this Wednesday evening, Powell homered twice and Palmer won his 19th game. When New York's Ron Hanson grounded to Belanger, who flipped it to Johnson for the force-out, the Orioles were AL East champs.

Now 3-for-3 in winning this newly created division, Baltimore had bigger fish to fry.

## 1971 ALCS

The Oakland A's were newcomers to the postseason. The difference in experience showed at the 1971 ALCS,

The series opened in Baltimore on a Sunday afternoon. The Orioles sent one of their four 20-game winners, Dave McNally, to face Oakland ace Vida Blue who would merely win both the Cy Young and MVP awards this season.

Oakland showed no signs of cold feet with a second inning assault. In short order, Sal Bando doubled, Angel Mangual tripled and Dave Duncan doubled. The score was 2-0 and there was nobody out. Dick Green dropped down a sac bunt to move Duncan to third. Blue came to the plate—this was two years before the advent of the DH rule in the American League.

Duncan was thrown out on the basepaths and that threat was ended. But in the top of the fourth, Mangual delivered again—a one-out RBI double that drove in Tommy Davis. The A's were up 3-0 and had the best pitcher in baseball on the mound.

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

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

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

Baltimore had another 20-game winner to go to, this one being Mike Cuellar. Oakland had another rising star in Catfish Hunter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Baltimore's balanced attack left them with several good candidates for the retroactive honor of ALCS MVP. Powell went 3-for-10 and homered twice. Davey Johnson also went 3-for-10. Buford and Blair had three hits apiece while starting just two games.

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

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

## 1971 WORLD SERIES

The 1971 World Series was the first time the Fall Classic played even a single game at night. The Series as a whole was one worthy of prime-time. The Pittsburgh Pirates and Baltimore Orioles staged an epic seven-game battle that was decided by a single run.

It was at Baltimore's old Memorial Stadium, on a Saturday afternoon, that this World Series began.

Clemente sought to immediately put his mark on the Series, but his two-out double in the first did not lead to any runs. In the top of the second, Bob Robertson worked a leadoff walk against Oriole starter Dave McNally. Robertson moved up on a wild pitch. Then, on a ground ball to short, the normally reliable Mark Belanger made a throwing error. The Pirates had a run and a man on second base.

Baltimore's miscues continued when Jackie Hernandez laid down a bunt. This time it was a throwing error by catcher Elrod Hendricks. Another run was in, another runner went to second base. With two outs, Dave Cash knocked an RBI single. It was the only hit of the inning...and enough to stake Pittsburgh starter Dock Ellis to a 3-0 lead.

Frank Robinson quickly cut into that lead with a solo home run in the bottom of the second. Pittsburgh threatened again in the third when Clemente singled and Stargell walked. There was no one out.

It was at this point that McNally not only escaped the inning, but turned the entire game around. He struck out the side to keep it a 3-1 run game. In the bottom of the inning, Belanger and Don Buford singled. Merv Rettenmund went deep and the Orioles had a 4-3 lead.

McNally was now locked in. From the fourth inning through the eighth inning, he retired 15 batters in a row. Only another Belanger error in the ninth broke the streak. Buford homered in the fifth to provide an insurance run and Baltimore grabbed the opener, 5-3.

A rainout pushed Game 2 back to Monday afternoon. The Orioles went to future Hall of Famer Jim Palmer. Pirate starter Bob Johnson didn't have the same renown, but he was fresh off outdueling another future Hall of Fame pitcher, San Francisco's Juan Marichal, in the NLCS.

Game 2 began in a way similar to Game 1. A Clemente hit in the first inning didn't lead to anything. The Pirates put runners on first and second with no outs in the second. This time though, the Orioles weren't giving out any defensive gifts. Palmer struck out the side and kept the game scoreless.

Frank Robinson led off the bottom of the second with a single. Hendricks worked a walk. Brooks Robinson singled and Baltimore was on the board. Any hopes of a further rally were squelched when Davey Johnson's line drive went right at Cash and Hendricks was doubled off second.

Clemente kept trying to rally the Pirate offense, with a third-inning double that gave Pittsburgh another opportunity with two men aboard and one out. Palmer got Al Oliver and Robertson to kill the threat.

After another Frank Robinson single in the bottom of the fourth, Bob Johnson got wild, with a walk and a hit batsman. The bases were loaded and there was no one out. Davey Johnson singled to left and scored two runs. Bruce Kison was summoned from the Pirate bullpen to try and limit the damage.

Kison was also wild, walking Belanger and then Palmer, scoring another run and keeping the bases loaded. At 4-0, Pittsburgh manager Danny Murtaugh kept going to his bullpen, this time for Bob Moose. This move worked. Don Buford flied out to left, and Davey Johnson was thrown out at home trying to tag up. The Pirates were in a hole, but they still had a shot.

But Baltimore had momentum and they kept coming in the bottom of the fifth. Five of the first six batters—Rettenmund, Boog Powell, Hendricks, Brooks Robinson and Davey Johnson—singled. It was 7-0, there were two runners on and one out. Bob Veale came out of the bullpen. Again, Belanger and Palmer were walked at the bottom of the order. It was 8-0 and the bases were loaded. Rettenmund delivered his second single of the inning for two more runs.

At 10-0, it was all over but the shouting. The Orioles later added another run. The Pirates' Richie Hebner hit a three-run homer in the eighth. But with an 11-3 win and a 2-0 Series lead, Baltimore was firmly in control as the World Series shifted to Pittsburgh.

Steve Blass was the Pirate ace, and the team had won both of his NLCS starts. But Blass hadn't really pitched well in either one. Now, Pittsburgh's fate was essentially in Blass' hands for Tuesday afternoon's Game 3. He faced off with Mike Cuellar.

Dave Cash started the Pirate first inning with a double down the left field line. An error set up runners on the corners with no outs. Clemente's ground ball out picked up the run. Stargell worked a walk to keep the rally going. Robertson then hit a line drive, but it went to Brooks Robinson at third, who doubled a runner off to end the inning. It was still 1-0 Pittsburgh.

Blass settled in quickly and the first Baltimore hit didn't come until a Brooks Robinson single in the fifth inning. Pittsburgh missed a couple chances with a runner on second and one out to add to the lead. But they didn't miss their chance in the bottom of the sixth. Manny Sanguillen started the frame by slashing a double into the right-centerfield gap. A base hit by Jose Pagan extended the lead to 2-0.

Frank Robinson replied with a solo home run in the seventh that got Baltimore on the board. But Blass was dealing and Pittsburgh would take out insurance. A Cuellar throwing error opened the door in the seventh. Then a walk. Robertson, fresh off hitting four home runs in the NLCS, went deep again here. It was 5-1. That's where it ended as Blass closed out a three-hitter.

So, we had a Series on our hands again as the lights went on for the first time in the Fall Classic for Wednesday night's Game 4. The Pirates went with Luke Walker, while the Orioles countered with Pat Dobson.

Baltimore wasted no time. Paul Blair started the game with a single. Belanger and Rettenmund legged out infield hits. A passed ball scored one run. After an intentional walk to Frank Robinson, Brooks Robinson picked up another run with a sac fly. The futile throw home allowed Rettenmund to take third, where he scored on a sac fly from Powell. With only one hit out of the infield, the Orioles had three runs. And, hard luck or not, Walker was taking an early shower.

Kison was now entrusted with a game the Pirates simply had to win. And the young reliever got some quick help from his own offense. With a runner on first and two outs in the bottom of the first, Stargell doubled into the gap to put Pittsburgh on the board. Oliver blooped another double. It was 3-2, and there was still a long way to go.

Oliver came through with another two-out RBI in the third, finishing a rally that began with base hits from Hebner and Clemente and tying the game up 3-all.

Pittsburgh missed chances to get the lead in the middle innings. With the bases loaded and one out in the fourth, the speedy Cash grounded into a double play. The bases were filled with one out again in the fifth. This time, Robertson popped up and Sanguillen grounded out. With runners on the corners and one out in the sixth, Oriole manager Earl Weaver went to the bullpen for lefty Grant Jackson.

Hebner hit a line drive, but it went right at Brooks Robinson. After a walk to Clemente, Stargell grounded out. The Pirates had left the maximum of nine runners on base through the 4th-5th-6th inning. As for the Orioles, they had no such problems. Their own offense hadn't mustered a hit off Kison since the second inning.

Pittsburgh rallied one more time in the bottom of the seventh, against Baltimore's excellent closer Eddie Watt. Robertson and Sanguillen singled with one out. Vic Davalillo lofted a fly ball to center. Blair, one of the great defensive center fielders of all-time, flubbed it. Amidst the mess, Robertson took third base...but Sanguillen got hung up between second and third. He was thrown out.

So, after all was said and done, there were runners on first and third, but now there were two outs. Were the Pirates about to let another chance go by the boards? Kison's spot was due up. Milt May came in to pinch-hit. He got the biggest hit of the Series to this point, a single to center that put the Pirates ahead 4-3.

Pittsburgh closer Dave Giusti picked up where Kison left off, allowing no hits. The Pirates had to fight and scratch and claw to a win game they had dominated, but this Series was now tied two games apiece.

We were back to midweek afternoon baseball for Thursday's Game 5. McNally was back on the hill for the Orioles. Robertson got him for a home run in the bottom of the second. Sanguillen singled, and then with two outs, the catcher stole second. It set up an RBI base hit from starting pitcher Nelson Briles.

That was all Briles would need, as Pirate pitching picked up where it left off the previous night. Briles went the distance and threw a two-hitter. Pittsburgh added a couple more runs, one of them thanks to a walk and a rare error from Brooks Robinson, another on a not-so-rare RBI hit from Clemente. The final was 4-0.

Over the final 16 innings of these games in Three Rivers Stadium, the Oriole offense had completely vanished, getting four hits total over that stretch. Baltimore undoubtedly welcomed Friday's travel day, as they went home with their backs now to the wall.

Homefield advantage and a rotation stocked with four 20-game winners still aren't a bad place to be. The Orioles trotted out Palmer for Game 6. The Pirates went to Moose, who swung between relief and the pen.

But Baltimore's bats stayed silent in the early going, while Pittsburgh gave Moose a lead to work with. In the top of the second, Oliver doubled to right, Robertson singled to left and it was quickly 1-0. Sanguillen singled. There were runners on first and second and no one out.

Palmer was able to take advantage of the bottom of the order, work out of that jam and temporarily keep it a 1-0 game. But in the top of the third, Clemente homered. The score was 2-0. It stayed that way until the sixth inning. With Baltimore's bats in a deep freeze, that two-run gap seemed massive.

Finally, Buford went the other way for an opposite field home run to cut the lead in half. An error by Hebner and a single from Powell set up the Birds with runners on the corners and no outs. Johnson came out of the Pirate bullpen. And facing the heart of the order, Johnson got it done. Frank Robinson popped up. Rettenmund struck out. Brooks Robinson grounded out.

In the bottom of the seventh, a one-out single from Belanger prompted Murtaugh to call for Giusti. With two outs, Buford came through again—this time it was with patience, drawing a walk that moved the tying run into scoring position. Davey Johnson singled. It was 2-2 and the Orioles had some fresh life.

Now it was the Pirate bats that had fallen silent, with Palmer locked in. The 2-2 tie went into extra innings. Weaver, naturally pulling out all the stops, had Dobson, another 20-game winner, come on in relief.



Cash tried to get something going for Pittsburgh, singling with one out in the tenth inning, then stealing second with two outs. Clemente and Stargell were walked. The only arm Weaver wasn't using today was Cuellar, whom the Orioles hoped would start Game 7. So, McNally came on in relief and induced Oliver to fly to center.

Bob Miller was on in relief for Pittsburgh. With one out, the trio of Frank Robinson, Rettenmund and Brooks Robinson was due up. The group that missed on a golden opportunity in the sixth, didn't miss here. Frank worked a walk and took third on a Rettenmund single. Brooks' fly ball to center was deep enough to win the game, 3-2. We were going to a Game 7.

It all came down to Sunday afternoon, with Blass and Cuellar again matching up. A walk and an error gave Baltimore the first scoring opportunity in the bottom of the second. But Belanger's ground ball to Cash turned into an inning-ending double play. In the third, Buford singled with one out. Blass promptly picked him off first.

So, we were still scoreless going into the fourth. It was time for Clemente. A solo home run to left-center gave the Pirates a 1-0 lead.

Both pitchers were dominating. A one-out double from Hendricks in the bottom of the fifth was the only thing remotely resembling a threat as the tense 1-0 game went into the eighth. That's when Stargell led off with a single, Pagan followed with an RBI double and Pittsburgh had a huge add-on run.

The run looked even bigger when the Orioles launched a desperate rally in the bottom of the eighth. Hendricks and Belanger singled to put the tying runs aboard with no outs. Tom Shopay, batting for Cuellar, dropped a bunt that moved the runners to second and third. Buford was at the plate. His ground ball to first scored a run, but it also gave Blass room to get Davey Johnson on a grounder to third and keep the lead.

It was still 2-1 when Baltimore came to bat for the last shot in the ninth. The Birds had the muscle of the order and could tie it with one swing. Powell grounded out. Frank Robinson popped out. Rettenmund hit a grounder to short, and that was it. The Pirates were champs.

Clemente finished this Series 12-for-29, and had been the one Pittsburgh player who performed throughout, even in the first two games. He homered twice, including the big Game 7 blast. He sparkled defensively throughout the Series. It's no surprise he was voted Series MVP.

The ultimate legacy of Clemente would come one year later when he tragically died in a plane crash while on a humanitarian mission to his native Nicaragua. The 1971 World Series serves as the less-important, but still notable baseball part of his legacy.

There were other Pirate heroes. Blass, with two brilliant outings in must-win spots where Cuellar was also pitching well, would have been a worthy MVP himself. Sanguillen collected 11 hits over the seven games.

On the Baltimore side, Brooks Robinson showed he could still shine—even in defeat—on the biggest stage, going 7-for-22. The problem was that he was only the Baltimore hitter to bat over .300 for the Series. Palmer had pitched exceptionally well for the Birds, including the must-win Game 6, while McNally posted a 1.98 ERA in over 13 innings of work. Cuellar had to go into the history books as the hard-luck victim of Blass, but the Oriole lefty certainly pitched well.

## 1972

Some big names were getting up in years. The 1972 Baltimore Orioles were a contender, but they took a step back this season. The good news was that, with younger players on the rise, the step back was really a pivot that would result in a fast return to the top of the AL East.

Frank Robinson was an all-time great, a Hall of Famer power hitter. And at the age of 35, he still had a couple good years left in him. But the Orioles operated on the adage that it was better to trade a player a year too early than a year too late. Robinson, along with pitcher Pete Richert, was moved to the Los Angeles Dodgers in exchange for four younger players, the most notable of which was 21-year-old pitcher Doyle Alexander.

Brooks Robinson, the hero of that '70 postseason, was also 35-years-old and his bat was fading. Brooks posted pedestrian numbers of a .303 on-base percentage/.342 slugging percentage, signifying the end was near for the great Hall of Fame third baseman.

The Robinsons—the departure of one and decline of another—were the reasons the Baltimore offense was sluggish in 1972, ranking just eighth in a 12-team American League for runs scored. Second baseman Davey Johnson had a bad year, batting just .221. Merv Rettenmund and Don Buford struggled with the bat at the corner outfield spots. Paul Blair in centerfield and Mark Belanger at shortstop were outstanding defensive players, but neither was known for their bat. Boog Powell, the slugging first baseman had a respectable stat line of .346/.434. But even that was a decline.

What kept the offensive situation from being truly hopeless—and what pointed to better days ahead—was some younger players who got a lot of at-bats. The most significant in 1972 was Bobby Grich. Playing both middle infield spots, Grich posted an on-base percentage of .358 and eventually took the second base gig from Johnson. Don Baylor, an up-and-coming power hitter, was another young name who started to get playing time. The same went for 25-year-old outfielder Terry Crowley.

Any other team would still have been completely sunk. But when you have pitching, you can compete. And did the Baltimore Orioles of this era ever have pitching.

In an era marked by workhorses, the top four starters on the Oriole staff combined to make 142 starts. Every one of them finished with an ERA under 3. Jim Palmer won 21 games with a dazzling 2.07 ERA. Mike Cuellar added 18 wins of his own. Pat Dobson and Dave McNally were the primary victims of poor run support and finished under .500. But they still added 29 combined wins.

The bullpen also delivered. Alexander paid immediate dividends, working over 100 innings, and posting a 2.45 ERA. Grant Jackson and Roric Harrison had sub-3.00 ERAs themselves. Scoring against the pitching staff was a tall order, and it's the reason the '72 Orioles still contended for the AL East title the entire way.

Major League Baseball as a whole got off to a poor start in 1972. A spring training lockout was the first of what would be many future disputes between management and the players. The season opener was delayed and early games would not be made up.

When play did begin in mid-April, Baltimore got off to a nice start, winning a couple of series against a Detroit Tigers team who eventually won the division. The Birds began to struggle against the AL West, losing eight of fourteen games. They bounced back with a four-game sweep of the Indians over Memorial Day weekend. When that sweep was completed, Baltimore was 20-15, a half-game up on Detroit, with surprising Cleveland a close third.

But then a bad 2-7 string followed, including three losses in four home games with the Oakland A's, the team Baltimore had eliminated in the 1971 ALCS, and who would start a run of three straight World Series titles this year.

When you have pitching though, slumps never last too long. Baltimore went on the road and enjoyed a successful trip, the highlight of which was the return visit to Oakland on June 12. In the series opener on Monday night, Dobson tossed a four-hitter as he battled A's ace Vida Blue. In a scoreless game in the top of the eighth, the Orioles got three singles from Johnson, Andy Etchebarren, and Buford to scrape across the game's only run.

Cuellar was the hero of Tuesday night. He went the distance and hit a two-run homer (the designated hitter was still a year away from existence) to lead a 5-1 win. And in the finale, it was McNally dueling with the great Catfish Hunter. A 1-1 tie went extra innings, with both starters still in the game. Grich got Catfish for a solo home run in the top of the 10th. McNally finished what he started, and the Orioles had the sweep.

It was all part of a 9-3 road trip that put Baltimore back on Detroit's heels. Later in June, the Tigers came to old Memorial Stadium holding a one-game lead. The series opened with a Saturday doubleheader. In the opener, Etchebarren and Blair homered off the great Tiger veteran Mickey Lolich. McNally threw six solid innings and Harrison cleaned up with three innings of one-hit relief. Baltimore won 3-1.

In the nightcap, Cuellar was brilliant, but trailed 1-0 in the bottom of the ninth. With two outs, Rettenmund worked a walk and Crowley picked him up with a double. Alexander pitched well in relief, but the Birds couldn't get that extra run. Eventually, they fell 2-1 in twelve innings.

But Palmer was waiting in the finale. The Hall of Fame great went the distance. In a 1-1 game in the top of the sixth, Crowley led off with a double and Brooks Robinson added an RBI single. The 2-1 win had the Birds back tied for first.

The quality of Baltimore's pitching always made stretches like this possible. The problems they had hitting also made things like losing four straight at home to the Texas Rangers possible. That's what happened on the far side of this nice run. The Orioles rebounded from that to win nine of eleven going into the All-Star break, but still trailed the Tigers by a game. The Indians had faded, and the Red Sox were lurking five games off the pace.

Between the All-Star break and Labor Day, the top teams in the AL East ground to a halt. Baltimore did not play well, going 18-21. Detroit was a little bit worse. The Orioles actually nudged into first place by a half-game by the September holiday. The consequence was that the Red Sox, along with the Yankees, were squarely in the middle of what was now a four-team race, just a half-game out themselves. The AL East promised fans a torrid finish to make up for the sport's wobbly start.

The division delivered the promised excitement, but the Orioles did not. Coming out of a Labor Day, in a week of multiple doubleheaders, Baltimore lost series to New York and Detroit before bouncing back on the weekend against lowly Milwaukee. The Birds slipped a game and a half back of Boston.

In the rematches with the Tigers and Yankees, the Orioles lost two straight to Detroit, before taking two of three from New York. The Red Sox and Tigers were tied for first, but Baltimore was still within 1 ½. But then they went to Boston and missed another opportunity, losing two of three. Having to settle for splitting two games with Milwaukee after that was a missed chance in its own right.

The Birds were 2 ½ back. There was still a week and a half to go, but they had two teams to catch, and the Red Sox and Tigers would play head-to-head in the final three games. Baltimore had to at least be in second place by that point to have a chance.

But the September fade would be consummated by losing two straight to Cleveland and dropping a home series to Boston. Over those five games, the Oriole offense mustered just seven runs. No pitching, not even the best in the American League, could cover for that.

Detroit beat Boston in a dramatic final series to win the AL East. Baltimore settled for an 80-74 finish and third place. They were fifth-best in the 12-team American League, and 12th among what were then 24 major league teams overall. In other words, while a winning season and a contending one, it was mediocrity from an organization that had become accustomed to delivering excellence.

The good news for Baltimore fans is that 1972 really was just a pivot.

## 1973

The 1973 Baltimore Orioles were a bounce back team—they returned to the top of their division and set the stage for another decade of success.



The rotation was led by 27-year-old Jim Palmer. The future Hall of Famer had another vintage season, winning 22 games, posting a 2.40 ERA and capturing the Cy Young Award. Mike Cuellar was 36-years-old, but still won 18 games with a 3.27 ERA. Dave McNally added 17 wins and a 3.21 ERA.

The trio of Palmer, Cuellar, and McNally combined for 113 starts in this era of workhorses. Manager Earl Weaver filled out the rotation with good-enough work from Doyle Alexander and Jesse Jefferson. And the bullpen was lights-out. Bob Reynolds and Grant Jackson each finished with sub-2.00 ERAs and Eddie Watt was a reliable reliever. The Orioles finished with the top staff ERA in the American League.

Baltimore's offense had slipped in 1972 and during the offseason, they traded away veteran second baseman Davey Johnson, who was starting to fade. The deal worked in two ways—the return was a promising young catcher in 24-year-old Earl Williams, who hit 22 home runs. Williams replaced another aging vet in Elrod Hendricks. And Johnson's job at second base went to another 24-year-old, in this case Bobby Grich. With a .373 on-base percentage, Grich got what would turn into a good major league career jump started.

The rise of the 24-year-olds continued in left field with Don Baylor, who posted a stat line of .357 OBP/.437 slugging percentage. Paul Blair would be mostly known for his elite defense in centerfield, and he had a good year with the bat in 1973, hitting .280. Al Bumbry was getting playing time at different outfield spots and he hit .337. Rich Coggins was another valuable reserve whose stat line ended up .363/.468.

And even though some of the old-time veterans—Boog Powell at first base, legendary third baseman Brooks Robinson, and outfielder Marv Rettenmund—no longer had their power, they still kept getting on base. Well before drawing walks were the “in thing” in baseball circles, this Baltimore team was defined by patience. They led the American League in walks, finished third in on-base percentage and, even without the power of some of their most dominant years, finished third in the AL for runs scored.

The season still started alarmingly like the previous one had gone—with a little too much mediocrity. The Birds were 18-19 on Memorial Day. But no one in the AL East was much better, with everyone packed within four games.

The early part of the summer saw what proved to be the decisive trend of the season emerge. The Orioles did not play well against key rivals—they went 8-11 against the Yankees, Red Sox, Tigers, and the AL West frontrunner Oakland A's. But they cleaned up against everyone else. And there were a lot more games against "everyone else". By the All-Star break, the Birds were up to 51-41. New York had the division lead, but Baltimore was only a game and a half back. Boston was a close third, and Detroit was six games off the pace in fourth.

The Orioles continued to struggle against fellow contenders in the late summer, getting swept at home by the Tigers and dropping three of five at home to the Red Sox. But Baltimore consistency continued to shine through in late summer. In games against non-contending AL West teams from Chicago, Minnesota, Kansas City, and Texas, the Orioles ripped off 14 wins in 15 games.

In the meantime, New York was in a free-fall and none of the other contenders had Baltimore's consistency. By the time Labor Day arrived to signal the stretch drive, the Orioles were sitting on a 78-54 record and a six-game lead on the Red Sox. Everyone else had fallen by the wayside.

A trip to Fenway out of the holiday weekend gave Baltimore a chance to drive home the dagger. That chance was missed, with three losses in four games. But the Orioles responded by taking a series in Cleveland and the lead stayed at five games. Baltimore split four with New York, and then swept lowly Milwaukee. The lead was out to seven games.

On the penultimate Saturday, the magic number was down to two. That afternoon, Boston lost to Detroit. The opportunity to clinch was there. Baltimore was in Milwaukee that same afternoon. The Orioles pounded out 17 hits, led by four hits from Tommy Davis. Alexander tossed a complete game. With the 7-1 victory, Baltimore was back on top of the AL East.

Their final record ended up 97-65, the second-best in all of baseball. They had gone 30-36 against the quartet of Boston, Oakland, New York, and Detroit. But domination everywhere else, highlighted by a 15-3 record against Milwaukee, brought the Orioles home.

## 1973 ALCS

The Oakland A's were no longer the inexperienced kids they had been two years earlier. Now, they were the defending World Series champs. This series would see the first two games played at Baltimore's old Memorial Stadium, and the balance of the series would be played at Oakland Alameda-County Coliseum.

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

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

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

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

Oakland needed momentum and shortstop Bert Campaneris wasted little time in giving it to them. "Campy" opened the game with a solo home run. But Baltimore struck again in the first inning. Al Bumbry got it started with a leadoff walk. Rich Coggins singled to put runners on the corners and Davis picked up the run with an RBI groundball. We were tied 1-1. Catfish and McNally both locked in and that score held until the sixth inning.

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



Campaneris beat out an infield hit with one out in the top of the eighth, and then stole second. The stolen base proved superfluous, as Bando homered again. The A's had breathing room at 5-2, but the trend of the Orioles bouncing back right away continued. Davis and Williams both singled. With one out, the great Rollie Fingers came out of the A's bullpen. Fingers got Terry Crowley to fly out, but Brooks Robinson came up with a two-out single to cut the lead to 5-3. The lead run was at the plate. When Bobby Grich drew a walk, the bases were loaded. Power-hitting Don Baylor came up. Rollie got him on a groundball to short.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 1974

Baltimore's greatness in this era was built on pitching, while the hitting had slipped a bit in the last couple of years. Given that, it seems surprising that the most significant offseason move was to deal a productive everyday player in Merv Rettenmund, for another starting pitcher, in Ross Grimsley. Those two players were the centerpiece of a five-player trade with the Cincinnati Reds. But the move still worked out. Even though the lineup continued to have problems, Grimsley's strong year was instrumental to winning the division.

Grimsley, at the age of 22, made 39 starts, worked nearly 300 innings, won 18 games and posted a rotation-best 3.07 ERA. Mike Cuellar was a 22-game winner with a 3.11 ERA. Dave McNally racked up 16 wins and finished with a 3.58 ERA. This trio combined to make 114 starts.

Their success and durability was essential, because Baltimore got a bad break when staff ace Jim Palmer—the reigning Cy Young Award winner and a future Hall of Famer—lost seven games in a row in the first half of the season, was diagnosed with a bad elbow and then spent a couple months on the disabled list. Palmer would return for the stretch drive and be a big part of it, but his season-ending numbers were a 7-12 record and 3.27 ERA in just 26 starts.

Manager Earl Weaver had a deep and balanced bullpen. Grant Jackson, Wayne Garland, and Bob Reynolds all finished with ERAs in the high 2s. Dan Hood was respectable and Doyle Alexander was versatile, making twelve starts. All of it added up to the Orioles having the second-best staff ERA in the American League.

But would they hit? Boog Powell, once a power-hitting MVP first baseman, could still get on base, with a .358 on-base percentage. But the power was gone. Brooks Robinson, the great third baseman, had an OBP of .353. But at age 37, his power was also shot. Earl Williams, the young catcher who had been so promising in 1973, slipped to mediocrity. Don Baylor, a talented young left fielder, had a .341 OBP, but his power mysteriously took a year off. Tommy Davis was unproductive in the designated hitter spot.

Bobby Grich had a nice year at second base, with a .376 OBP, but the fact his 19 home runs led the team tells you the difficulties with power. Perhaps even more telling is that Paul Blair was second on the team in dingers. Blair was a terrific center fielder, one of the best of his time. He had a surprisingly good year with the bat, hitting 17 home runs. But if he's your #2 muscle guy, you've got problems. And the Birds did.

Weaver compensated for some of the lack of punch with the running game. Baylor, Blair, and right fielder Rich Coggins combine to steal 82 bases. Baltimore finished third in the American League in steals. But they still ended up ninth in what was then a 12-team American League for runs scored.

Baltimore was up and down in the early part of the season. The highlight was winning two of three at home over the Oakland A's in late April, and then going out west and doing it again in early May. The lowlight of the early going for the Orioles was losing four of six to the lowly Milwaukee Brewers, who would bedevil them throughout the year, and dropping three of four to the Boston Red Sox at home in mid-May.

By Memorial Day, Baltimore was playing .500 ball. The good news is that the entire division—in fact the entire American League—was all hovering around mediocrity. The AL's best record was 24-20 and its worst was 18-24.

The Orioles continued to slog along and were 38-36 when they got on a little hot spurt. They went to Boston and took three straight, and then went to Oakland and won another series in early July. By the All-Star break, Baltimore was 49-45, only a half-game off the pace being set by the Red Sox, and with the entire division still within five games of each other.

The Birds stumbled out of the break, losing series to Cleveland and Milwaukee, and then went 15-15 through August and up to Labor Day. As the holiday weekend signaled the stretch drive was here, Baltimore's record was only 67-65. They were five games back of Boston. The New York Yankees were nestled in between, just two games out.

The Orioles, Red Sox, and Yankees had gotten some separation, but there was work to do. And a home series with Boston that started with a Labor Day doubleheader was a necessary place to start.

Grimsley took the ball for the first game on Monday against Boston ace Luis Tiant. Grich hit a solo home run in the bottom of the fourth. That was all Grimsley got. It was all he needed, allowing just three singles in a complete-game 1-0 shutout.

In the nightcap, Cuellar faced crafty Red Sox lefty Bill Lee. In the bottom of the third, Brooks Robinson and Enos Cabell singled. A bunt from shortstop Mark Belanger set up Blair to drive in a run with a sac fly. That was all Cuellar got. It was all he needed, allowing just two singles in a complete-game 1-0 shutout.

Palmer went for the sweep on Wednesday. He got a little more to work with. Baltimore erupted for four runs in the fourth inning, and then added a couple more. It was all more than Palmer needed. He allowed just three singles in a complete-game 6-0 shutout.

It was one of the most stunning displays of pitching dominance ever seen. A first-place team with a stacked lineup had managed just eight singles in three games and been held scoreless. It's a series that lives in Red Sox infamy. And when the Orioles followed it up by taking three of four from Cleveland on the weekend, they closed to within a game of the lead.

The Yankees were now tied with the Red Sox for first. After Baltimore split a pair with Milwaukee, they lost a home series against New York, to briefly cool the surge. In a busy nine-game week with two doubleheaders, the Birds again took three of four from the Indians. With the record now 78-70, Baltimore had moved past Boston, but still trailed New York by 2 ½ games on September 15.

With Yankee Stadium under renovation in 1974, the Yanks were playing their home games at Crosstown Shea Stadium, sharing with the Mets. So, for the crucial September 17-19 series, the Orioles would go to Queens.

Palmer took the mound in Tuesday night's opener and came up big again. He allowed just seven singles. In a scoreless tie in the eighth, Blair delivered a two-out, three-run blast against New York closer Sparky Lyle. Baltimore won 4-0.

Wednesday night's game was tied 2-2 in the top of the sixth. The Orioles got three singles, hit two doubles, and drew four walks, while sending twelve batters to the plate. The seven-run eruption blew it open and Cuellar won this game 10-4.

Thursday night was McNally's turn to shine under pennant race pressure. He went the distance with a shutout of his own. A lead that was just 1-0 after seven was broken open late, and the Orioles won 7-0. They had another big sweep of a divisional rival.

Baltimore followed it up by traveling to Fenway and taking two of three on the weekend from the Red Sox. But the Yankees countered by sweeping four straight from the Indians. With ten days to go, New York was 84-70 and Baltimore was 83-71. Boston had completely collapsed.

The last full week was a thrilling one at old Memorial Stadium. Baltimore hosted the Detroit Tigers and Milwaukee. The Birds won all five games. Three of those wins came in walkoff fashion. One was a game they trailed 4-2 in the ninth, and another took 17 innings to seal. When the week was over and there were three days left, Baltimore was in first place at 88-71. New York was nipping at their heels, 88-72.

The Yankees were idle on Monday, when the Orioles would decide which way that dangling half-game would swing. They were in Detroit and won 12-6. The lead was a full game with two to play.

Tuesday was a tension-filled night. The Orioles and Tigers were tied 6-6 going into the ninth. The Yankees led the Brewers 2-0 in Milwaukee. This race looked certain to go to the final day and perhaps even be tied.

Baltimore got a big RBI double from backup catcher Andy Etchebarren in the top of the ninth, and they won 7-6. They were able to go to the clubhouse and get word that Milwaukee had rallied with two runs in the eighth, and then won 3-2 in the ten innings. The AL East race was over.

## 1974 ALCS

The 1974 American League Championship Series marked the third time in four years the Oakland A's and Baltimore Orioles had squared off for the pennant. This year's rotation called for the series to open with two games in Oakland and conclude with up to three played back east in Baltimore.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tuesday's Game 3 saw Vida Blue go for the A's, while the Orioles gave the ball to Jim Palmer. And a series that had already seen some good pitching was about to go to a whole new level.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the big picture, this 1974 ALCS marked the end of what can be considered the A's-Orioles Era of American League baseball. Baltimore continued to be a competitive contender, but they did not return to the postseason until 1979. Oakland came back for one more shot in 1975, but lost in the ALCS, and then fell off the map for a few years. This series marked a pivot point in the history of the American League.

## 1975

The 1975 Baltimore Orioles team were another strong team, but it was also the year the dynasty ended.

Earl Weaver held the managerial reins and his teams were built on pitching. 1975 was no different, as Baltimore had the best team ERA in the American League. Jim Palmer led the way with 23 wins, a 2.09 ERA and 323 innings pitched. That's not a typo—Palmer pitched over three hundred innings en route to a Cy Young Award.

Palmer wasn't the only workhorse on the staff. Mike Torrez won 20 games, worked 270 innings and finished with a 3.06 ERA. Mike Cuellar, a crafty veteran, went 256 innings, won 14 and had a 3.66 ERA. Ross Grimsley was the light worker of the staff—and he still threw 197 innings, something that makes him the horse of a modern day rotation.

The Palmer-Torrez-Cuellar trio assumed such a heavy load, because there was a lack of proven pitchers in the bullpen. Doyle Alexander put in the most work and had a nice 3.04 ERA, but Alexander was only 24-years-old. Nor could the offense carry the team—the Orioles finished eighth in the American League in runs scored.

Baltimore had traded first baseman Boog Powell in the offseason, an enormously popular player, who today runs a barbequed ribs stand outside right field in Camden Yards, and makes regular appearances. The Orioles got Lee May in return, and while May was a good player who had a nice career, 1975 wasn't one of his better campaigns. While he hit 20 home runs and had 99 RBIs, the on-base percentage was poor, at .308 and the slugging percentage of .424 was mediocre.

What's more, Weaver had three dead spots in his lineup, at least from an offensive perspective. Mark Belanger at short and Paul Blair in center were as good as it gets defensively, but neither could so much as hit .230 in 1975. Dave Duncan, the catcher who would eventually become a trusted pitching coach confidant to Tony LaRussa, couldn't hit. And perhaps most painful for Orioles fans was that their great third baseman, Brooks Robinson, was at the end of the line. Robinson was 38-years-old and hit just .201.

It's not that the Orioles didn't have offensive talent. The corner outfield spots were manned by Don Baylor and Ken Singleton, each complete offensive packages and young. Second baseman Bobby Grich had a .389 on-base percentage. But there just wasn't enough, at least by the high standards Baltimore had set for itself over the previous six years.



The AL East was getting tougher. The Boston Red Sox had knocked on the door for seven years and brought up two dynamic outfielders in Fred Lynn and Jim Rice. The New York Yankees were starting to find their footing under the relatively new ownership of George Steinbrenner and beginning to throw their financial weight around in a baseball world that saw free agency making its first baby steps.

Baltimore lost two of three against Boston early on, and a six-game losing streak towards the end of April and early May left the Orioles 5 ½ games out of first place. The good news was that both the Red Sox and Yankees were off to a slow start, and the frontrunning Milwaukee Brewers seemed unlikely to keep up the pace.

On May 5, Palmer beat Yankee ace Catfish Hunter with a complete-game five-hitter that started a 7-2 stretch for Baltimore. But the good times didn't last. The Kansas City Royals and Oakland A's were playing the best baseball in the American League over in the Western Division, and the Orioles suffered back-to-back series sweeps on a road trip that went through both cities in succession.

Palmer again beat Hunter on the Fourth of July, this time in New York, and with more help from the offense. Trailing 3-2 in the ninth, Baylor hit a game-tying home run, the Orioles scratched out two more runs and Palmer hung on for a 5-4 win. The Orioles took two of three in the Bronx, and eventually nudged the lead down to 4 ½ games. But Boston had pulled even with Milwaukee, and Baltimore couldn't sustain, dropping to 41-44 by the All-Star break and an eight-game hole.

The Red Sox were creating breathing room in the division race, and even though the Orioles started to make their move and got over .500 for good on July 25, they couldn't make a real dent in the divisional lead. Finally, trailing by 9 ½ games in early August, Baltimore began to make the kind of late-season push that made them consistently feared in the second half by division rivals.

Boston came to Baltimore for two games, and Palmer fired a two-hit shutout to beat Sox ace Luis Tiant. It started an 11-4 run for the Orioles and they chipped the lead down to 6 ½. In early September, with the lead at an even six games, the Red Sox again arrived in old Memorial Stadium for two games.

This time, you got the sense that a late Baltimore push wouldn't get over the top. Palmer and Torrez pitched well in each game, but the Orioles lost each time, 3-2 and 3-1 as their offense was not able to produce against a fairly mediocre Red Sox pitching staff.

Baltimore didn't quit though, and a five-game win streak pulled them to within 4 ½, setting up two games in Fenway Park, with all of New England looking nervously at the orange-and-black car in their rearview mirror.

Tiant and Palmer went toe-to-toe in a brilliantly pitched game, and the offensive problems in Baltimore went on full display. They were shut out on five hits, and fell 2-0. It was the last stand, as the surge crested. The Orioles finished the season 90-69, with the margin still at 4 ½ games.

It would be a massive stretch to say the 1975 season ended the good times in Baltimore. But it was the year that marked the ending of Baltimore having the AL East as its own personal property.

## 1976

The 1976 Baltimore Orioles made some big moves to try and get back on top. But the end result was still a second-place finish.

Baltimore continued to have the strong pitching staff that had defined them during the Earl Weaver era. Jim Palmer was a horse, working over 300 innings, winning 22 games, and posting a 3.15 ERA. Palmer won his second straight Cy Young Award and the third of his Hall of Fame career. Wayne Garland made 25 starts and also pulled some relief duty, en route to winning 20 games himself.

But the rotation behind Palmer and Garland had problems with consistency. No one else made more than 21 starts, at a time when starting pitchers routinely went to the post 30 times or more. The decline of Mike Cuellar, a mainstay of the rotation in the early 1970s, was another blow. Cuellar made just 19 starts, finished with an ERA of nearly 5 and was released.

The bullpen had a decent arm in Dylan Miller and an up-and-comer in Mike Flanagan, but they needed help. Baltimore's staff ERA was still a solid fourth in the 12-team American League, but that was a decline from what Oriole fans were used to seeing.

Baltimore's lineup also needed some help. Lee May had a good year, with 25 homers and 109 RBIs. Ken Singleton, Mark Belanger, and Bobby Grich all had strong on-base percentages. But that was about it.

What the Orioles needed were reinforcements. And on April 2, just before the season started, they would pull the trigger on a big move.

The Oakland A's had been an even bigger dynasty than Baltimore in the first half of the 1970s, winning three straight World Series titles and taking two of three ALCS meetings from the Birds. But the era of free agency, just now beginning, was a threat to that. Oakland was dealing off talent to try and salvage something before everyone left. And the carrot of Reggie Jackson was dangled in front of the Oriole front office.

Baltimore paid a price—they gave up a good power-hitting outfielder in Don Baylor and a decent starting pitcher in Mike Torrez. But they got Reggie, and they also got Ken Holtzman, a key part of the A's rotation.

There was one problem—the contract situation with Reggie wasn't entirely settled, and it took a month for everything to work out. Jackson didn't play his first game until May 2. But once in the lineup, he made a difference. Reggie hit 27 homers, stole 28 bases, finished with an OBP of .351 and helped lift an otherwise troubled offense to sixth in the American League for runs scored.

The Orioles opened up at home and promptly took two of three from the Red Sox. But Boston would fade this year and the New York Yankees would step up. The Orioles lost two straight to the Yanks at home and started 6-10. That's where things stood when Reggie reported for duty.

On May 14, Baltimore was a middling 12-13, but only 3 ½ games back. They went to the Bronx for a weekend series. Reggie's two-run blast in the top of the first keyed a four-run outburst and the Orioles won 6-2 behind Grimsley. On Saturday, outfielder Al Bumbry had three hits, but it went to waste in a 7-3 loss. But in the Sunday finale, Belanger delivered a four-hit game and third baseman Doug DeCinces added three more. Holtzman tossed a five-hitter and Baltimore cruised to a 7-0 win. In spite of the slow start, the Orioles were squarely in the race.

After winning two of three up in Boston on Memorial Day weekend, Baltimore was 22-19, and 3 ½ back of New York. Boston was six games out. The race was on.

Or was it? The Birds collapsed at the start of June and lost 11 of 12 games to AL West opposition. The trade deadline in this era was on June 15. Baltimore made yet another big move, and this time they stayed within their own division—dealing with the team they were trying to catch.

Holtzman had made 13 starts and had a 2.86 ERA. He was traded to the Yankees. Baltimore also gave up veteran catcher Elrod Hendricks, reliever Grant Jackson and another notable starting pitcher in Doyle Alexander.

If all that seems like a tacit waving of the white flag, it probably was—but a look at the young players Baltimore got back tells you why. Rick Dempsey, Scott McGregor, and Tippy Martinez were just coming into their own and all of them would be a big part of the Orioles' future. They also got Rudy May back to help fill the void left by Holtzman. May made 21 starts the rest of the way, winning 11 games with a 3.78 ERA.

It's a deal that the Orioles, in the big picture, clearly got the better of. But it wasn't going to help them catch New York in 1976.

Nonetheless, Baltimore started to play better baseball. With a record of 24-31 at the time of the Yankee trade, they won eight of nine games, including a series win over Boston. At the All-Star break, the Orioles were 40-42, 10 ½ back of New York, and running one game behind the Red Sox.

Weaver's teams were always renowned for hitting their stride in the second half of the season, and that proved true again this year. On July 26, with a record of 46-48 and staring at a 14 ½ game deficit, Baltimore hosted New York. And the Birds started what would be a nice finish to the season.

In Monday night's opener, the Orioles grabbed two early runs behind RBI hits from Reggie and Lee May. Grimsley outdueled the great Catfish Hunter in a 3-1 win. On Tuesday, Palmer tossed a complete-game four-hitter and won 4-1. In Wednesday night's finale, trailing 3-0 in the sixth, Bumbry slashed an RBI triple to put Baltimore on the board. Then, in the seventh, four singles, a walk and a wild pitch plated three runs. The Orioles won 4-3 and closed the sweep.

They went on to go 22-15 leading up to Labor Day. They were still 10 ½ back, so there was no pennant race fever. But Baltimore was now 71-63 and comfortably ensconced in second place. The Birds went on to sweep the Yanks one more time, en route to a closing record of 88-74.

That final record remained 10 ½ games in New York's rearview mirror. But it was third-best in the American League and eighth-best overall—in other words, a clear playoff season by the more relaxed standards of our modern era. And, as a point of pride, the Orioles had taken 13 of 18 from the Yanks.

## 1977

The 1977 Baltimore Orioles made a surge forward and won 97 games, but again had to settle for second place.

Baltimore suffered key free agent losses in the offseason. Second baseman Bobby Grich departed, and the biggest loss was Reggie Jackson, who spent one year with the Orioles in between his more heralded tenures in Oakland and New York. Jackson's decision to sign with the rival Yankees made his loss hurt twice as much.

Paul Blair, the great defensive center fielder, was traded to New York in a deal that did not work out. Elliot Maddox was the key piece coming back, and while Maddox finished with an on-base percentage of .375, he only played 49 games.



If offseason moves weren't going to help, then someone had to come from within and the Orioles found a future Hall of Famer in 21-year-old Eddie Murray. He hit 27 home runs and finished with 88 RBI and won Rookie of the Year honors.

Murray handled the DH role this year while 34-year old Lee May still occupied first base. May hit 27 home runs of his own and drove in 99.

The Baltimore offense was top-heavy, with Ken Singleton being the other big-time contributor. With a .438 on-base percentage, 24 home runs and 99 RBI, Singleton finished third in the American League MVP voting.

Other contributors included centerfielder Al Bumbry and his .371 OBP, and young third baseman Doug DeCinces, who finished with a .339 OBP/.433 slugging percentage. Overall though the Oriole offense did not have great depth and they finished 7th in the 14-team American League in runs scored.

Pitching was what defined the Orioles in manager Earl Weaver's tenure and while the 1977 staff wasn't on a par with what was produced in 1969-74, it was still pretty good. Jim Palmer won 20 games, pitched over 300 innings and finished second in the AL Cy Young Award voting.

Palmer was supported by Rudy May, the lefty who won 18 and pitched 251 innings. Mike Flanagan, the 25-year-old who would win the Cy Young in 1979, won 15 with a 3.64 ERA. Ross Grimsley was another 200-inning horse.

The rotation suffered the same problem as the lineup, and it was a lack of depth. Tippy Martinez, with a 2.70 ERA, was the only reliable reliever. There were two talented 23-year-olds, Scott McGregor and Dennis Martinez, who had bright futures ahead of them in the rotation. But in a mix of relief and spot starting each had ERAs in the 4s in 1977.

Baltimore lost three straight at home to Texas to open the season and were still just 9-8 by the end of April. It was May that things picked up, starting off with an 8-3 stretch against poor opposition in Seattle and Oakland. The Orioles then won three of five games in New York, including a 12-inning Saturday affair where Murray hit a two-out, two-run single to win it.

When Memorial Day came, Baltimore was 25-17 and in first place, a game and a half up on New York and 2 ½ ahead of Boston. But the Orioles started June by losing seven of ten, including two straight in Fenway Park when they were outscored by the Red Sox 21-8. Baltimore slipped two games back and when Boston came south to old Memorial Stadium it got worse—the Red Sox scored 25 runs in four games, the Orioles were shut out twice and by the time the sweep was finished, Baltimore was staring at a 6 ½ game deficit in the AL East.

The Orioles nudged back to within 3 ½ games and then went up to Fenway to turn the tables. The opener of a three-game series was shaping up as a classic duel between Palmer and Boston ace Luis Tiant and Baltimore trailed 2-1 after seven innings. DeCinces unloaded, hitting home runs in both the seventh and the eighth and the Orioles pulled away to an 8-2 win. They won the next game 5-2 behind Flanagan and a 12-8 slugfest completed the sweep.

New York was waiting back at Memorial Stadium and after dropping the opener, Baltimore again heated up. They trailed the second game 5-3 in the eighth with Yankee closer Sparky Lyle, who ultimately won the Cy Young Award on the mound. The Orioles scored three times and beat Lyle 6-5. Grimsley threw a shutout in a 6-0 win. Murray closed out the series with a walkoff RBI single in a 4-3 win.

By the All-Star break, Baltimore was 53-39, a game and a half up on Boston and three games ahead of New York.

A late July trip to Yankee Stadium saw things start to turn for the worse. The Orioles held a 4-0 lead early in the game and were still up 4-2 in the ninth. Tippy Martinez gave up a two-run homer to tie it, and then Reggie won it for the Yanks with a walkoff shot in the tenth. Baltimore lost two of three in the series and it led to an August where control of the race got away.

It had less to do with the Orioles, who played reasonably well, going 16-11 and more to do with the Yankees, who sizzled in August with a 22-7 mark. But either way, it meant that on Labor Day, the Orioles were five games out and in third place. The Red Sox were 4 ½ out in second.

Baltimore took advantage of a soft schedule stretch in September and won 10 of 13 from Detroit, Cleveland and Toronto and closed to within 2 ½ games to stay alive. The Orioles won a series with the Red Sox and pushed to within a game and a half on September 22 with a week and a half to go. It was still a race.

The problem was, the divisional matchups, especially with the Yankees, had been frontloaded and Baltimore was out of chances to play New York. The Orioles dropped two of three in Cleveland and when the final weekend began, Baltimore and Boston were both three games back and playing head-to-head. One of them had to sweep and the Yankees had to be swept at home by lowly Detroit.

New York lost on Friday night, and a slugfest ensued in Fenway. The young arms, Dennis Martinez and McGregor, struggled and the Orioles trailed 11-7 in the ninth. Then they scored three times and loaded the bases with one out. Maddox came to the plate. The failure of the Blair trade came full circle right here as Maddox struck out. Bumbry grounded out and the bid for the AL East title was over.

Baltimore got a small token of revenge on Saturday, knocking out Boston with an 8-7 win on a day New York lost again. With both the Orioles and Red Sox now eliminated, when the rain came on Sunday, they just called it a season. Each team finished 97-64.



## 1978

The 1978 Baltimore Orioles weren't able to make a serious run at the AL East title, given the stacked nature of the division. But they added to Weaver's 90-win legacy.

Jim Palmer continued to be the rotation anchor. The three-time Cy Young Award winner and future Hall of Famer won 21 games, posted a 2.46 ERA, logged 296 innings, and finished third in the Cy Young voting.

Behind Palmer were three up-and-comers. Dennis Martinez, 24-years-old, made 38 starts, won 16 games, and finished with a 3.52 ERA. Mike Flanagan, just a year away from winning a Cy Young of his own, went to the post 40 times and won 19 games. And finesse lefty Scott McGregor worked over 230 innings and won 15 games.

An offseason trade had sent a reliable starter, Rudy May, to the Montreal Expos (today's Washington Nationals). In return, Baltimore strengthened their bullpen with Don Stanhouse. He became the closer and saved 24 games with a 2.89 ERA. But depth behind Stanhouse was a significant problem. Tippy Martinez had an off-year.

Even in an era when starters were expected to work deep and finish games, this was still too thin of a pen. Oriole pitching as a whole was still good, but it wasn't great, ranking fifth in the 14-team American League.

The offense was a significant problem. There was a lack of production at catcher, second base, and two outfield spots. Even at DH, veteran Lee May's 25 home runs came at the price of an on-base percentage that was only .286 and a slugging percentage that was .414.

Baltimore had three significant contributors with the bats. Ken Singleton posted a stat line of .409 OBP/.460 slugging and popped 20 homers. Doug DeCinces' stat line was .346/.526, as he homered 26 times and drove in 80 runs. And 22-year-old Eddie Murray, fresh off winning Rookie of the Year in 1977, had a line of .356/.480, to go with 27 homers and 95 RBIs. But that wasn't enough to stop the Orioles from clocking in ninth in the AL in runs scored.

In 1977, Baltimore had fought with the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees to the bitter end in the AL East before the latter prevailed. The Birds already knew the Sox and Yanks were going to be tough rivals—and indeed, they would be the best two teams in baseball in 1978.

What no one was expecting was that the Milwaukee Brewers were also going to jump into the mix. Baltimore was the first team to get a taste of that. They went to old County Stadium in Milwaukee to open the season, got hammered for 40 runs in three games and were swept.

The Orioles did bounce back and sweep the Brewers three straight on the return trip to Baltimore, but the early part of the season was a struggle. They lost three of four to both New York and Boston and dropped two of three to eventual AL West champ Kansas City. By Memorial Day, the Orioles were 21-24, in fifth place and staring at a 10-game deficit.

Weaver's teams often started slow and then heated up along with the weather. That proved to be the case again this year. The Birds ripped off 19 wins in 22 games. Most of it was against the AL West, but it included series wins over the Yankees and Brewers. Baltimore nudged within 6 ½ games. But then they went to Boston and to lowly Toronto and promptly dropped seven straight.

A series win at home over the Red Sox seemed to stabilize the ship, but the Orioles ended the first half much the same way it had begun—their pitching got hammered in Kansas City, giving up 24 runs in a three-game sweep.

Baltimore was 45-40 at the All-Star break and in fourth place. They were 13 games behind frontrunning Boston.

The Birds were hot out of the break and won 11 of 15, again cleaning up on the weaker AL West and slicing the deficit to 7 ½ games. They went to Milwaukee in early August and won a series. After losing a series in the Bronx, they welcomed the Yankees to old Memorial Stadium for a three-game series. Two teams trying to put some heat on the Red Sox met for a weekend set starting on August 11.

It was a rain-soaked weekend in Baltimore, and the Orioles lost a five-inning game on Friday night, 2-1. They bounced back on Saturday night, getting home runs from Lee May and Pat Kelly to grab the early lead, and won 6-4. More rain came on Sunday. McGregor allowed just three hits and was leading 3-0 after six innings when play was called, and the game made official. Baltimore had the series win.

Even so, the Orioles couldn't make consistent headway, even as the Red Sox started to slip. On Labor Day, Baltimore's record had improved to a strong 76-61, but they were still in fourth place, and still ten games out. They hosted the Red Sox for a three-game set starting on Labor Day afternoon.

It was a big sports day in Charm City. The NFL season was opening, and the then-Baltimore Colts were on Monday Night Football against the defending Super Bowl champion Dallas Cowboys. The Colts, with starting quarterback Bert Jones on the shelf, got hammered. But the Orioles gave the city something to cheer about. Murray, along with outfielder Larry Harlow had three hits apiece. McGregor pitched into the ninth inning and Baltimore won 5-3.

On Tuesday, Palmer tossed a five-hitter, Lee May homered, and the Orioles grabbed a 4-1 win. They lost the finale—Martinez pitched brilliantly, but Boston's Luis Tiant was even better, in a 2-0 decision. Baltimore was playing well, but they looked more like a spoiler than a contender at this point.

After winning two straight in Toronto, the Birds went up to Fenway for a two-games set. Trailing 4-1 in the eighth inning of Monday night's opener, Baltimore rallied with three runs. But the bullpen depth issue bit them—reliever Joe Kerrigan gave up a home run in a 5-4 loss. Martinez responded by dealing a six-hitter in Tuesday's 3-2 win. The Orioles were within six games, but there were three teams, including the Brewers, ahead of them.

Losing two straight in Milwaukee removed any narrow path Baltimore might have had. New York and Boston would fight beyond the last day, with the Yankees prevailing in a historic one-game playoff. The Brewers would finish third.

But Baltimore played some good baseball to close it out. They won nine of their final 15 games and hit the 90-win threshold on the nose. Their final record was still fifth-best in the American League overall, and eighth-best in all of baseball. In other words, they were a playoff team by our modern standards.

One year later, Baltimore would be a playoff team by the standards they actually lived in.

## 1979

Weaver's great teams had been built on pitching, and this team was no different. To say the Orioles led the league in ERA is accurate, but also understates the case. The ERA differential between the Baltimore staff and the second-best team was the same as the gap from #2 to #10.

Mike Flanagan won 23 games and the Cy Young Award. Dennis Martinez, Steve Stone, Scott McGregor were all effective, with ERAs in the 3s. The veteran Jim Palmer no longer had the same arm that won him three Cy Youngs, but he was still good enough to post a 10-6 record and 3.30 ERA.

And the rotation was just the beginning. The bullpen was deep and versatile. Sammy Steward worked 117 innings and posted a 3.52 ERA. Tippy Martinez won ten games with a 2.88 ERA. Tim Stoddard didn't have the same workload, but his 1.71 ERA spoke volumes, while Don Stanhouse saved 21 games with a 2.85 ERA.

This staff carried an offense that only ranked eighth in the American League. The production at catcher, second base, third base, centerfield and DH was fairly mediocre. But big years from three players provided enough punch.

Eddie Murray was only 23-years-old and getting started on what would be a Hall of Fame career at first base. Murray hit 25 home runs, finished with 99 RBIs and had an on-base percentage of .369. Ken Singleton in right field was even better—a .405 OBP, 35 home runs and 111 RBIs. Singleton finished second in the American League MVP voting. And while Gary Roenicke wasn't one of the big names on this team, he was popular locally and for good reason—in 1979, he finished with an on-base percentage of .378 while hitting 25 home runs.

The Orioles got off to a poor start, with a 4-8 beginning. That included losing five of the six to the two-time defending World Series champion New York Yankees. It also included taking four straight losses in Milwaukee, where the Brewers had emerged as a contender in the AL East in 1978.

Here's a good point to remind younger readers that not only were the Brewers an American League team until 2002, there was also no Central Division. Each league was simply an East and a West until 1994. Thus, the Brewers, Cleveland Indians and Detroit Tigers joined Baltimore, New York, the Boston Red Sox, and Toronto Blue Jays in the AL East—and only the first-place team went to the playoffs, moving directly into the League Championship Series.

Thus, slow starts were always at least a little more concerning than is the case today, and certainly when it comes at the hands of key division rivals. Milwaukee was making a return visit to Baltimore for a four-game weekend series on April 20. It was as good a time as any to right the ship.

In Friday night's opener, Roenicke and second baseman Rich Dauer stepped up with three hits apiece. Singleton homered. Stone tossed seven good innings and produced a 6-3 win. On Saturday, veteran DH Lee May homered twice, drove in four runs, and provided all the offense for Stewart. The versatile pitcher started, went seven strong and won 4-2.

Sunday would be an old-fashioned doubleheader, with just twenty minutes in between games. Third baseman Doug DeCinces and outfielder John Lowenstein both homered in the opener, Dennis Martinez went the distance and Baltimore secured a series win, 6-2. And in the nightcap, they nailed down the sweep—three hits and four RBIs from Murray, home runs from DeCinces and Singleton and eight sharp innings from Flanagan. The final was 7-3 and the Birds were off and running.

This four-game sweep triggered a 14-1 run that included sweeping the eventual AL West champion California Angels. By Memorial Day, Baltimore was 29-16. They were two games up on Boston, plus-five on New York, and Milwaukee was six games off the pace.

The Orioles ripped off a dominating June, going 23-6. The surge put the Brewers and Yankees in a considerable hole—nine games and eleven games back respectively. But the Red Sox were hanging tough, still within 4 ½. And when Baltimore cooled just a bit—a 5-7 West Coast road trip leading into the All-Star break, Boston pulled to within two games. The Orioles and Red Sox were the two best teams in all of baseball midway through.

Baltimore took their revenge on the West Coast—the Angels, Oakland A's, and Seattle Mariners—when those same teams came East, and the Orioles won eight of ten. They had pushed their lead back out to five games when they went to Milwaukee on July 30, where the Brewers were still on the fringes of the race.



Stone was brilliant in Monday night's opener and a two-run blast from centerfielder Al Bumbry was all that was needed in a 2-1 win. On Tuesday night, home runs from catcher Rick Dempsey, along with Murray, had the Birds up 5-4 in the ninth. Murray unloaded with an insurance grand slam and the final was 9-5. And on Wednesday night, three first-inning runs staked Dennis Martinez and he rolled to a 5-2 win.

Baltimore's AL East lead was now 7 ½ games. They flew to New York. For the Yankees, it was the day a tough season turned tragic—catcher Thurman Munson died in a crash while flying his private plane. A pall was cast over all of baseball.

The Oriole surge slowed in the first part of August when they went 7-8. Boston was within four games and Milwaukee was still in striking distance at 7 ½ out. But this stretch of late summer leading into Labor Day was decisive. Baltimore went 9-4. The Red Sox hit the skids and fell into third place. The Brewers moved into second, but were still eight games off the pace.

Already in a comfortable position, the Orioles all but put this race to bed with a 7-3 road trip that included taking three of four up in Fenway Park. They were 11 games up. The clinching moment came on the regular season's penultimate Saturday. Baltimore, their magic number down to 1, was waiting to play Cleveland in a night game. When word came from Milwaukee that the Brewers had lost in the afternoon, Saturday night could be one long party in old Memorial Stadium.

Baltimore's final record was 102-57. They had comfortably won a division where Boston and Milwaukee also won 90-plus games and New York, even in a tragic year, won 89 games. The Orioles were heading into October as the team to beat.

## 1979 ALCS

The California Angels were novices at this postseason baseball thing, having won their first AL West title. It was Baltimore who had the upper hand in a series whose individual games were much more competitive than the series result as a whole.

The first two games would be in Charm City, with the balance of the ALCS played out in Anaheim over the weekend.

Two future Hall of Famers took the ball in Game 1. Jim Palmer was on the mound for the Orioles against the Angels' Nolan Ryan. California got to Palmer with two outs in the first, as Dan Ford hit a solo home run. Two innings later, the Angels attacked again with two outs and again it was Ford doing the damage. After a base hit by Rick Miller and a walk to Carney Lansford, Ford drilled an RBI double for a two-zip lead.

California second baseman Bobby Grich was a former Oriole and he helped his old team in the bottom half of the third with an error that triggered a Baltimore rally. Rick Dempsey hit an RBI double and light-hitting shortstop Mark Belanger tied the game with a two-out RBI single.

The Angels should have gotten to Palmer again in the fourth when Rod Carew led off with a double and there were quickly runners on the corners with no one out. But Palmer escaped and his team took the lead in the inning's bottom half. Pat Kelly drew a walk, stole second, took third on a wild pitch and scored on a sac fly from third baseman Doug DeCinces.

Carew, one of the best pure contact hitters to ever play the game, singled in the sixth and scored the tying run on a double by Grich. The Orioles were in position to get the lead right back when they put two on with one out. But Ryan induced Lee May to hit into a 5-4-3 double play.

Palmer was now dialed in and rolled through the ninth, keeping the Angels at bay. Ryan left after seven, but John Montague kept the Orioles under control in the eighth and ninth. The game went into extra innings.

California went quietly in the top of the 10th against reliever Don Stanhouse. DeCinces led off the home half of the inning. DeCinces would soon leave Baltimore via free agency to join these same Angels, but tonight he was just a thorn in the side of California manager Gene Mauch. DeCinces began the 10th with a single and was quickly bunted up to second. With two outs, Montague intentionally walked leadoff hitter Al Bumbry.

John Lowenstein, a platoon outfielder and left-handed hitting specialist, was up. He launched a three-run blast to win the game 6-3. Lowenstein was the hero, but Baltimore pitching had been decisive—over the last four innings, California managed just one hit, a single by Carew.

Game 2 was a late Thursday afternoon start, beginning shortly after 3 PM, so there was no time for the Angels to lament their Game 1 fate. Especially not when Baltimore was coming back with soon-to-be Cy Young Award winner Mike Flanagan.

The second game started just like the first—with a two-out solo blast from Ford to get the Angels a quick 1-0 lead. But this one quickly got away from California starter Dave Frost when it was time for him to take the mound.

Bumbry led off with a single and then stole second. Subsequent singles by Eddie Murray, Kelly, DeCinces, two walks and an error produced four runs. In the bottom of the second, Bumbry walked and again stole second. After he scored on a base hit from Kiko Garcia, Frost was out and Mark Clear was in.

It didn't help. After a single from Ken Singleton, Murray delivered a three-run jack and this game was blown wide open early 8-1. When DeCinces led off the Oriole third with a walk and scored on consecutive two-out singles from Bumbry and Garcia, it looked like just another meaningless run that made it 9-1. It turned out to be incredibly important.

Flanagan cruised through five. The Angels touched him again in the sixth when Carew doubled and came around on a single from Lansford. In the seventh, singles from Don Baylor and Brian Downing led to a Grich sac fly and it was 9-3. Still nothing to suggest a game was in the offing.

The top of the eighth was when it got interesting. Flanagan issued a leadoff walk. After an error, Lansford drove in a run that made it 9-4 and left runners on the corners. Baylor, who would win the AL MVP award from the DH spot this year, drove in another run with a single that moved Lansford to third and chased Flanagan. Downing hit a sac fly.

Baltimore might have put the game away all over again after two bunt singles opened the bottom of the eighth, but they couldn't get anything across. It set the stage for a dramatic ninth inning.

Stanhouse walked the leadoff man, Larry Harlow, and then gave up a one-out double to pinch-hitter Willie Davis. California had made it all the way back to have the tying run at the plate. Carew grounded out. One run scored, but the Angels were down to their last breath. Ford was up and he singled the other way. The hit cut the lead to 9-8 and on a futile throw to third, Ford moved up to second. The winning run was improbably in scoring position.

Oriole manager Earl Weaver ordered an intentional walk to Baylor, preferring to take his chances with Downing. The move paid off. Downing bounced a grounder to DeCinces who stepped on third. Baltimore survived a hair-raising 9-8 finish.



A rain-out had delayed the opening of the ALCS by a day, so the normal day off for travel was not in place. The teams headed west and were back on the field for Friday night, an early evening start locally and prime-time in the East. The Orioles sent Dennis Martinez out to try and clinch their first pennant since 1971. Frank Tanana, the Angel lefty, had his team's season in his hands.

For the third straight game, California scored in the first inning and though it wasn't Ford hitting a home run, the right fielder was still in the middle of it. After Lansford singled and stole second, Ford picked him up with a base hit. The 1-0 lead held until the top of the fourth, when Singleton doubled and consecutive singles from Murray and May tied the game.

Baylor did not have a good ALCS, going just 3-for-16. His biggest hit came in the bottom of the fourth in Game 3 when he homered for a 2-1 lead. The Angels had a great chance to extend the lead in the bottom of the fifth when the bases were loaded with one out. Alas, Ford finally came up short, hitting into a double play.

In the top of the sixth, Baltimore made it hurt. Singleton and Murray singled and May drew a walk to load the bases with none out. DeCinces sac fly tied the game and moved Murray to third. Now it was California's turn to come up big defensively. Rich Dauer hit a fly ball to center that Murray tried to tag up on. Miller gunned him down at the plate and kept it a 2-2 game.

It didn't stay that way long though. Bumbry lashed a one-out triple in the seventh and scored the go-ahead run. In the meantime, Martinez was cruising, having set down ten in a row heading into the ninth inning. Then he got Baylor to start the final frame.

Carew wasn't going quietly and he went the other way for a double into the left-center gap. Weaver called for Stanhouse. The reliever walked Downing, but got Grich to hit a lazy fly ball to center. Unbelievably, the reliable Bumbry dropped it and the game was tied. Harlow then doubled and the Angels had stolen a 4-3 win.

All three games had been heartstoppers. Bumbry was on a big hook if his team didn't close out this ALCS. But he and all of Baltimore could soon breathe easy. Because the thrill-a-minute baseball that marked the first three games was about to come to a screeching halt on Saturday afternoon.

Baltimore got after California starter Chris Knapp in the third for two runs. A base hit, a walk and a bunt single led to a Singleton sac fly and RBI hit for Murray. Even though Gary Roenicke hit into a double play the Orioles already had enough runs for lefty Scott McGregor.

DeCinces and Dempsey each doubled in the fourth to make it 3-0. The Angels rallied in the fifth, when singles by Downing and Grich helped load the bases with none out. But a Miller fly ball wasn't deep enough to score a run and McGregor then induced a double play ground ball. The 1979 ALCS effectively ended at this point.

Baltimore blew it open in the seventh. Singleton and Roenicke each had RBI singles and Kelly delivered the coup de grace with a three-run blast that opened an 8-0 lead. McGregor completed a six-hit shutout and the Orioles were returning to the World Series.

Murray is the pick for a retroactive ALCS MVP. He was 5-for-12, homered and the multiple intentional walks he kept getting underscored how much California feared him and got his OBP for the series to .588.

Other heroes included Dempsey, who went 4-for-10 with two doubles and Singleton was 6-for-16. On the California side, Carew had seven hits and Ford's consistent first-inning dominance always had the Angels in games.

## 1979 WORLD SERIES

The cities of Pittsburgh and Baltimore have become renowned for their NFL rivalry in the 21st century. In the sports world of 1970s, it was baseball where these two blue-collar fan bases had it in for each other.

Baltimore held homefield advantage. The Orioles sent Cy Young winner Mike Flanagan to the mound for Game 1, while the Pirates countered with Bruce Kison.

It didn't take Baltimore long to get started. Al Bumbry blooped a single to lead off the home half of the first and Mark Belanger drew a walk. A ground ball out moved them both up, a walk filled the bases and an error on Pittsburgh second baseman Phil Garner plated two runs. Then a wild pitch scored a third run and Oriole third baseman Doug DeCinces homered. It was 5-0 before anyone was even settled in.

Kison didn't survive the inning and one person who did settle in was reliever Jim Rooker. He pitched 3 2/3 innings of shutout ball, allowing just two hits. And the Pirates began to grind their way back.

Tim Foli and Dave Parker led off the fourth with singles and productive groundouts scored a run. In the sixth, Parker and Bill Robinson led off with singles. Flanagan got two outs and was poised to escape when three straight ground balls were hit toward DeCinces. He booted two, one got through for a clean single and the Pirates cut the lead to 5-3.

In the top of the eighth, Willie Stargell homered. Now it was a 5-4 game and Baltimore hadn't remotely threatened since the first. They were just hanging on and ultimately, they barely survived. Parker singled with one out in the ninth, his fourth hit of the game. But Rick Dempsey gunned Parker down trying to steal.

Stargell popped out to end the game. It seems fair to question Pittsburgh manager Chuck Tanner on why Parker was running when his team's best clutch hitter, one who had already authored several big moments in the stretch drive of the regular season and NLCS, to say nothing of having just homered in his previous at-bat was at the plate. Baltimore took the opener 5-4.

Jim Palmer had won three Cy Young Awards in his great career with the Orioles and though he was no longer that caliber of pitcher, he was still pretty good and he got the ball in Game 2. Bert Blyleven went for the Pirates.

Pittsburgh got to Palmer in the second with singles from Stargell, John Milner and Bill Madlock, along with a sac fly from Ed Ott, to get two runs. Baltimore's Eddie Murray promptly cut that in half with a home run to lead off the home half of the inning.

Murray then tied the game in the sixth, as he doubled in Ken Singleton, and subsequently moved up to third with one out. Parker then came up big defensively. Murray tried to tag on a line drive out off the bat of John Lowenstein, and Parker nailed Murray at the plate. The game remained tied 2-2.

It was still a 2-2 game in the ninth and both starting pitchers were out. Bill Robinson led off with a single for Pittsburgh. Oriole manager Earl Weaver summoned Don Stanhouse. The closer had trouble in the ALCS win over the California Angels and the trouble didn't stop here.

Even though Dempsey threw out Robinson trying to steal, Stanhouse allowed a two-out single to Ott, walked Garner and then surrendered a base hit to Manny Sanguillen. The soft spot of the Pirate lineup had beaten the Oriole closer and Pittsburgh tied the series with a 3-2 win.

The action shifted to Pittsburgh for Friday night's Game 3. There was no travel day, as the opening of the Series had been postponed by a day due to rain. Scott McGregor had pitched the clinching game of the ALCS for Baltimore and he got the call, facing John Candelaria, who won the opener of the NLCS for Pittsburgh.

Weaver inserted Kiko Garcia into the lineup at shortstop for Mark Belanger. The latter was the best defensive shortstop of his time, but his bat was woeful. Weaver was clearly looking to kickstart an offense that had been quiet for 17 innings, and had required the Pirates beating themselves for even that five-run outburst in the first inning of Game 1.

Garcia didn't waste time making his manager look good. He doubled to start the game, the first of his four hits. But the Orioles wasted a first-and-third with no outs opportunity. Pittsburgh scored in their own half of the inning when Moreno hit his own leadoff double and came around on productive outs.

Pittsburgh got two more runs in the third, as Garner followed singles by Stargell and Steve Nicosia by doubling both in. But Garner tried for a triple and got thrown out, so in spite of a later single by Candelaria, McGregor got off the hook with the score still 3-0.

The Orioles started coming back in the third when Garcia walked and Bennie Ayala homered. Their own potential big inning got cut down when they got two more runners aboard, and Gary Roenicke singled, but Ken Singleton was nailed at the plate by Bill Robinson.

Baltimore tied the game an inning later when Rich Dauer doubled, Dempsey singled and Foli booted a grounder off the bat of McGregor. Then it got away from Candelaria. Garcia tripled in two more runs and chased the starter. Enrique Romo came on in relief, hit Bumbry with a pitch, gave up an RBI single to Singleton and an RBI groundout to DeCinces. Suddenly, the Pirates trailed 7-3.

Pittsburgh got a run back in the sixth when Stargell doubled and scored, but Dempsey did the same in the seventh and the Orioles won 8-4.

Game 4 was in the early part of Saturday afternoon, with Dennis Martinez pitching for Baltimore and Jim Bibby on the mound for Pittsburgh. The Pirates were feeling the heat and Stargell set a quick tone, homering to dead center in the second inning. That was followed by a base hit from Milner and consecutive ground-rule doubles from Madlock and Ott to make it 3-0.

Garner then singled, but Ed Ott was thrown out at the plate. Martinez didn't survive the first inning, as Weaver went to Sammy Stewart. Moreno drove in another run with a single, but Stewart picked him off first base. The Pirates led 4-0, but had lost two runners on the bases.

Those missed chances didn't take long to start appearing consequential. A Madlock error in the third gave Baltimore life, and it was followed by a Bumbry single and two-out doubles by Garcia and Singleton to cut the lead to 4-3. Madlock came to bat in the bottom of the inning with the bases loaded, one out and a chance to redeem himself. He grounded into a double play.

Pittsburgh scored twice in the fifth. Milner drilled an RBI double and there were runners on second and third with one out. Madlock was given an intentional walk, but Ott's ensuing fly ball to left was too short to score even the fast Parker who was on third. The Pirates added another run in the sixth when Parker lashed a two-out double to score Foli. But 6-3 was still a game going into the late innings and there was no reason for it to be so.

Baltimore finally made Pittsburgh pay in full for their sins. Garcia and Singleton singled to start the eighth. DeCinces drew a one-out walk. Tanner called for his closer, Kent Tekulve. Weaver sent up pinch-hitter John Lowenstein, who had hit an extra-inning walkoff home run in the ALCS. This time Lowenstein ripped a two-run double to cut the lead to 6-5. After an intentional walk, Weaver sent up another pinch-hitter, Terry Crowley. He smacked a two-run double and Baltimore had the lead.

Weaver had emptied his bench so thoroughly, the pitcher Tim Stoddard had to bat for himself. No matter. Stoddard singled and another run came home. A Bumbry grounder scored yet another run and it was 9-6. Stoddard pitched the final two innings without incident.

Baltimore now had Flanagan ready to go for Game 5 and home games with Palmer and McGregor and reserve. It was a long road back for Pittsburgh. On Sunday morning, prior to the fifth game, Tanner's mother passed away. Was it the extra jolt of motivation the Pirates needed, to win it for the skipper? Or was the comeback about to happen something that would have taken place anyway?

Who knows, but the trajectory of this Series was about to alter, and in more ways than just the Pirates starting to take over. The pitchers also began to take over.

Rooker got to start for Pittsburgh in lieu of Kison, whose turn was up, after the reliever had significantly outpitched the starter in Game 1. The game was scoreless until the fifth. The Orioles picked up a run when Roenicke doubled, DeCinces singled and Dauer's double play grounder brought the run in the back door.

It was the sixth when Pittsburgh got to Flanagan. Foli drew a leadoff walk, Parker singled, both were bunted up and Stargell tied the game with a sac fly. Madlock then singled with two outs, a clutch hit that marks the moment the 1979 World Series really turned.

Blyleven had come on out of the pen in the sixth inning and shut down Baltimore the rest of the way. Pittsburgh got two runs in the seventh. With two outs, Foli tripled to score Garner and Parker then doubled. In the eighth, four singles and an intentional walk scored three more and Pittsburgh stayed alive, 7-1.

After five days of non-stop baseball, the teams got a chance to catch their breath on Monday, with the flights back to Baltimore. Candelaria matched up with Palmer for Game 6 and the result was a tense pitcher's duel.

Palmer escaped a jam in the first with the Pirates put runners on second and third with no outs. The Oriole starter got Parker and Stargell no less to keep the game scoreless. But Candelaria returned the favor in the same inning when Baltimore had first and third and one out, and he induced Murray to hit into a double play.

No one threatened through six innings, when the Pirates finally got to Palmer in the seventh. Moreno singled with one out and Foli followed suit. Parker singled to right and Stargell picked up another run with a sac fly. Baltimore never threatened and Pittsburgh added two more runs in the eighth, with an RBI double from Garner, who moved up to third and scored on a sac fly from Moreno. With the 4-0 win, the Pirates had forced a seventh game.

McGregor and Bibby were on the mound. It was not an ideal situation for Pittsburgh—Bibby was on three days' rest and even though that wasn't incredibly uncommon in the world of 1979, it still wasn't the norm and Bibby wasn't one of Pittsburgh's best. But the need to use Blyleven for four innings in the must-win Game 5 had thrown the Pirate rotation out of whack.

It didn't matter. Baltimore got a run in the third when Dauer homered, but the Orioles couldn't mount sustained threats. McGregor looked like he might make it stand up when he kept the 1-0 lead into the sixth. Bill Robinson hit a one-out single and Stargell came to the plate.

Stargell hit a fly ball to deep right. It looked like Singleton might have a play on it near the wall. He nearly did. The right fielder leaped, but the ball cleared the fence. Pittsburgh had a 2-1 lead, and with these teams playing games whose style resembled the modern-day defensive football brawls of the Steelers and Ravens, that one-run margin seemed enormous.

It was 2-1 in the eighth, when Baltimore finally rallied. Lee May and Bumbry drew one-out walks. Tekulve was summoned. He got Crowley to ground out, and the runners moved up. Singleton was intentionally walked. The decision was to pitch to Murray. The 23-year-old had enjoyed a great year, was embarking on a Hall of Fame career and had been red-hot in the ALCS. But he was 4-for-25 in the World Series. And it was about to be 4-for-26. Murray hit one to deep right, but this one stayed playable for Parker.

Pittsburgh added two insurance runs in an incredibly sloppy ninth. Weaver used five pitchers, four of them facing just one batter. There were to hit batsmen, and with a 4-1 lead, it was all but over. Tekulve closed the door without incident.

Stargell was World Series MVP.. He finished 12-for-30 and drove in seven runs. His three home runs were the only homers for any Pirate player. One of them happened to win Game 7. So yes, even though Foli and Garner both peppered Oriole pitching consistently, Pops was an easy call.

Had the Orioles won, the choice likely would have been Garcia, who went 8-for-20 and whose insertion in the lineup in Game 3 had temporarily altered the Series. Although if the theoretical Baltimore win had come in Game 7 behind McGregor, the lefty might have been the pick.

## 1980

The 1980 Baltimore Orioles were even better, but it didn't translate into a championship. It didn't even add up to a postseason appearance. The Orioles won 100 games, but were outlasted in the AL East by the 103-win New York Yankees.

Baltimore was built on strong pitching under manager Earl Weaver and 1980 was no different. Even though Mike Flanagan, the 1979 AL Cy Young Award winner, slipped to a 4.12 ERA and 16-13 record, there was someone else ready to step up—Steve Stone won 25 games, posted a 3.23 ERA in 250 innings of work and kept the Cy Young in Baltimore.

The balanced rotation was filled out by lefty Scott McGregor, who used his pinpoint control to win 20 games with a 3.32 ERA. Veteran Jim Palmer won 16 games with a 3.98 ERA. Overall, these core four starting pitchers combined to start 143 games. The ERAs ranged from Stone's 3.23 to Flanagan's 4.12 and all four worked over 220 innings. That's consistency.

Weaver lost closer Don Stanhouse to free agency, but Tim Stoddard stepped up with 26 saves (a good number for an era when complete games were in much greater abundance) and Sammy Stewart was a workhorse, with 118 innings and a respectable 3.56 ERA. Dennis Martinez made twelve spot starts, otherwise worked out of the pen and posted a 3.97 ERA.

The staff overall posted the third-best ERA in the American League. And the offense, which ranked fifth in runs scored, wasn't far behind.

Eddie Murray, the future Hall of Fame first baseman and just 24-years-old in 1980 was the focal point of the attack. Murray batted .300, hit 32 home runs, finished with 116 RBI, scored 100 runs and delivered some stellar defensive work at first base. He finished sixth in the American League MVP voting.

Ken Singleton in right field was another good all-around player. Singleton batted .304, popped 24 home runs and drove in 104 runs. Murray and Singleton were the big guns of the attack and after that Weaver relied on steady depth.

Al Bumbry was a solid leadoff man, batting .318. Rick Dempsey and Rich Dauer were good defensive players at catcher and second base respectively and each finished with on-base percentages over .330, making them at least respectable with the bat.

The left side of the infield was more of a problem, with third baseman Doug DeCinces having an off-year at the plate and shortstop Mark Belanger having long been known as a defensive whiz, but an offensive liability. The difference was that this year, the normally good-hitting Kiko Garcia, who Belanger split time with at short, collapsed to a .199 batting average.



Weaver got good production from his left field platoon of young Gary Roenicke and veteran John Lowenstein. The latter in particular, who finished with a .403 OBP. Terry Crowley was a part-time DH and finished with a .364 OBP/.476 slugging percentage. Pat Kelly posted a .363 OBP in his own part-time role of DH and the outfield. With the manager using these moving parts in the lineup, built around Murray and Singleton, the Orioles produced runs.

Baltimore started slowly, although that wasn't unusual in the Weaver era, when they often surged after the All-Star break. The Orioles lost four of five early games with the Yankees and also dropped three of four in Milwaukee, where the Brewers were then an AL East team and had finished second to Baltimore in 1979. By Memorial Day, the Orioles were still sub-.500 at 19-22, in fifth place and six games back of New York.

They lost two of three at home to Milwaukee in early June and didn't clear .500 until June 17, in the midst of a 13-3 stretch that helped push Baltimore to 42-36 by the All-Star break. They were now up to fourth place, but nine games back of the Yankees.

A middling 6-5 start to the second half gave no signs of an impending surge and the Orioles were ten games back on July 21. Then they took off, winning 14 of 17 games, cutting the Yankee lead to 5 ½ games and going to New York for a three-game weekend series on August 8.

Murray answered the bell in the opener with four hits, including a home run. Palmer worked into the eighth inning and beat 1978 Cy Young winner Ron Guidry 5-2. Saturday's game was tied 2-2 in the eighth when Singleton delivered an RBI triple and Crowley tacked on a single for some insurance. Stone got the complete-game win.

In Sunday's finale, Flanagan struggled and the Orioles trailed 5-4 in the ninth. Utility infielder Lenn Sakata led off with a triple. When May and Dauer failed to pick him up, it looked like a great opportunity might disappear and Baltimore would miss its chance for a knockout blow in the series. Dempsey hit a clutch single to tie the game and after Singleton walked, a Murray double gave the Orioles a 6-5 win and cut the lead in the AL East to 2 ½ games.

New York nudged back out to 3 ½ games and a rare five-game series over five days between the two rivals was at hand in old Memorial Stadium.

Stone did what an ace is supposed to do and set the tone with a complete-game two-hitter in Thursday's 6-1 win. Flanagan again struggled on Friday, giving up four early runs. Stewart pitched four-plus innings of shutout relief, but the early deficit was too much in a 4-3 loss. On Saturday, the Baltimore attack could only muster five hits off veteran Gaylord Perry. The 4-1 defeat left the Orioles in danger of letting their recent progress slip away.

The offense was no better on Sunday, but McGregor was clutch, with a complete game six-hitter and a 1-0 win. In Monday evening's final game, the Oriole offense unloaded for three runs apiece in the fourth and fifth innings. Bumbry finished with three hits, two RBIs and was in the middle of both rallies. New York rallied to cut the lead to 6-5 in the eighth, but Stoddard closed the door. The Birds were still within 2 ½ games and there was still a month and a half to finish the job.

Baltimore knocked the lead to a meager half-game and for five days between August 22-26, it stayed on that. But that was the high-water mark. The point at which the Oriole surge crested came on Labor Day weekend against an Oakland A's team that was mediocre, but on the rise and under the leadership of an old enemy—Billy Martin, just two years earlier the Yankee manager.

Flanagan's rough year continued in the Thursday opener against Oakland as he took a 7-1 loss. Baltimore then dug themselves a 6-2 hole on Friday before a three-run home run by reserve outfielder Bennie Ayala was the key to a rally for an 8-7 win. But Palmer took a hard-luck 3-2 loss on Saturday and Stone finally cracked on Sunday. The ace gave up three runs in the first and lost 5-2.

Baltimore played well after that, but New York was just setting the bar too high. The race never really got razor-tight again the rest of the season. The Orioles finished the season with the second-best record in baseball but got left out of the October party. Nonetheless, the 1980 Baltimore Orioles, with their 100 victories, deserve a place as one of the great teams in franchise history and Earl Weaver's successful tenure.

## 1981

The Birds had a good, contending team in '81. But a strange, strike-marred season kept them out of the playoffs.

Eddie Murray led the way. In a schedule where Baltimore only played 105 of its games, the first baseman hit 22 home runs and finished with 78 RBIs. He had a stat line of .360 OBP/.545 slugging percentage. On the other side of the infield, third baseman Doug DeCinces posted a respectable stat line of .341/.454. Ken Singleton played right fielder and his final numbers were .380/.435. Al Bumbry set the table and the centerfielder finished with an OBP of .358 and stole 22 bases.

But there were holes in the lineup elsewhere. Neither Rick Dempsey at catcher, nor Rich Dauer at second base had a productive year with the bat. Veteran shortstop Mark Belanger was always more known for his glove, and in his declining years, his offensive numbers fell off the table. The leftfield platoon of Gary Roenicke and John Lowenstein didn't do much.

Designated hitter Terry Crowley proved emblematic of the offense. He only hit .246. But he saved himself with his plate discipline, turning that into an on-base percentage of .376. As a team, Baltimore was average or worse in most offensive categories. But they led the American League in drawing walks. That was enough to at least keep them afloat, ranking 8th in the 14-team AL for runs scored.

Pitching was always the Orioles' strong suit during the Earl Weaver era, but the staff had their own challenges. Jim Palmer, the Hall of Fame ace, was now 35-years-old, and he was starting to show his age. Palmer made 22 starts and finished with a 3.75 ERA. Mike Flanagan, just two years removed from a Cy Young Award, finished with a pedestrian 4.19 ERA. Steve Stone, the reigning Cy Young Award winner, was even worse, making only 12 starts, winning just four games, and posting a 4.60 ERA.

Dennis Martinez and Scott McGregor stepped up to lead the staff, combining to win 27 games and finish with ERAs in the low 3s. But no one had an "ace" season and that was something Baltimore was not accustomed to.

The bullpen had a reliable lefty-righty combo of Tippy Martinez and Sammy Stewart. Tippy saved 11 games with 2.90 ERA. Stewart, even in the shortened season, logged 112 innings on the strength of 26 relief appearances and three starts. His ERA was a sharp 2.32. The Oriole pitching staff, like the offense, was good enough to stay afloat, ranking seventh in the American League for composite ERA.

After a middling 9-9 start, Baltimore reeled off 15 wins in their next 20 games. They moved into first place, a game ahead of Cleveland and a 1 ½ up on New York. The Yankees came into old Memorial Stadium for a three-game series that started on Memorial Day.

DeCinces threw a holiday party for himself against New York ace Ron Guidry. DeCinces homered twice and drove in five runs. Palmer dominated and Baltimore won 10-1. On Tuesday night, Crowley hit two home runs. The second was a three-run blast in the fifth that put the Orioles up 6-4. Stewart took over from McGregor halfway through, tossed 4 1/3 innings of one-hit relief and the 6-4 score held.

Wednesday night's finale was more DeCinces and Crowley. The former again went deep twice. The latter hit a two-out/two-run single in the bottom of the ninth to deliver a thrilling 6-5 win. Baltimore had the sweep, and they had a three-game lead in the AL East race.

But that race was going to end sooner rather than later. The Orioles were swept on a return trip to the Bronx and fell into a first-place tie. Then they lost four of seven. On June 12, Baltimore was 31-23, two games back of New York. And the players union went out on strike.

The strike ripped two months out of the season, and it wasn't until August 10 that play resumed. Commissioner Bowie Kuhn decided to salvage the season by declaring that teams in first place were the first-half "champions." Everyone's slate would be wiped clean, and the balance of the schedule would determine the second-half "champions." The two teams would then meet in what proved to be the inaugural Division Series.

What if the same team won both halves? Then the team that finished second in the second half would advance, with the only reward for the first-place finisher an additional home game in the Division Series. With little to play for, New York was a non-factor in the second half. Baltimore was back to square one.

The Orioles went 15-11 through August and the early days of September. The Tigers were setting the tone in the AL East's second half with a record of 18-9 on Labor Day. The Brewers were 17-11 and the Red Sox were 14-12. It was anyone's race to take in the final month.

Over the next two weeks, Baltimore lost four of six key head-to-head games with Milwaukee. The good news is that Detroit came back to the pack. With two weeks to go, the Tigers were 24-16, the Red Sox were 23-16, the Brewers stood at 24-17, and the Birds were 21-17.

You may be noticing that Baltimore has played fewer games than their AL East competition. In picking up the schedule at an arbitrary point, Major League Baseball made no effort to ensure that all teams would play an even number of games. It's an inequity that would play a factor in the Orioles' push to reach the playoffs.

Although Baltimore was missing their opportunities. They lost two of three at home to Detroit before bouncing back to take a weekend series in New York.

With a week to go, they had a chance, but it was a narrow one. The Tigers were 27-19, with the Brewers and Red Sox both just a game back in the loss column. The Orioles, at 24-21, were only two back in the loss column, but the fewer number of games meant they would lose any tie. Moreover, Detroit and Milwaukee were scheduled to play on the final weekend. Baltimore had to catch at least one of them by Friday.

At the very least, a trip to Tiger Stadium gave them a chance. In Monday night's opener, Palmer gave up three first-inning runs and was quickly yanked for Stewart. The latter merely worked 8 1/3 innings of shutout relief. Murray drove in four runs and turned it around to a 7-3 win.

McGregor took the hill on Tuesday night, and he also failed to make it out of the first inning. This time, the bullpen and bats weren't coming to the rescue. Baltimore took a 14-0 shellacking. After rain on Wednesday, they concluded the series by winning an extra-inning affair on Thursday afternoon. Dennis Martinez went seven strong and left with a 4-2 lead. Tippy coughed up the lead, but Roenicke bailed the reliever out with a 10th-inning sac fly and a 5-4 win.

But the win was too late. The Brewers had won a head-to-head series with the Red Sox. The Milwaukee-Detroit finale was winner-take-all for the second half. Baltimore was only a game back in the loss column. Had there been an equal number of games played, they would have had a shot at pulling into a tie with a sweep. But there was no such provision.

Baltimore still finished 59-46 as a whole. That's a pace to win 91 games, was third-best in the American League and sixth-best in the majors. Even with the struggles at so many spots, Weaver had produced a team that was playoff-caliber by the standards of today.

## 1982

Earl Weaver had become a legend in Baltimore since he became the manager of the Orioles in 1968. The ensuing fourteen years had seen five 100-win seasons, six AL East titles, four American League pennants and a World Series title. The 1982 Baltimore Orioles were his last real ride. They were an excellent team who produced a memorable season, and came within one win of making it epic.

Eddie Murray was the engine of the offense and the 26-year-old future Hall of Famer finished with a .391 on-base percentage/.549 slugging percentage, while hitting 32 home runs with 110 RBI.



He was joined by a rookie named Cal Ripken Jr., who hit 28 home runs and drove in 93 runs. The room for Ripken had been created by trading veteran third baseman Doug DeCinces and releasing another vet, defensive wizard Mark Belanger.

The leftfield spot was a platoon that, if you could combine the two players, could have been the MVP. John Lowenstein posted a .415/.602 stat line, while Gary Roenicke put up .392/.499. The two players combined for 45 home runs and 140 RBI.

Veteran catcher Rick Dempsey finished with a respectable .339 OBP and second baseman Rich Dauer was in the same neighborhood at .337. Third baseman Glenn Gulliver was called up in July and down the stretch his OBP was .363. They provided solid support, but the disappointments in the offense was the decline in production from centerfielder and leadoff man Al Bumbry, along with 35-year-old designated hitter Ken Singleton.

The offense still finished fifth in the league in runs scored. The bigger disappointment was the pitching staff. Long an Oriole hallmark, the staff finished eighth in the American League in ERA and depth was a real problem. Tippy Martinez, Sammy Stewart and Storm Davis had decent years out of the bullpen and in spot-starting duty, but none were anything special.

The rotation relied overwhelmingly on four arms, none of whom was great in 1982. Dennis Martinez was the workhorse, with 252 innings, but a pedestrian 4.21 ERA. Mike Flanagan, the Cy Young winner in 1979 had an okay 15-11 record with a 3.97 ERA. Scott McGregor, the lefty with pinpoint control, had a good career, but his 4.61 ERA in '82 wasn't one of his better years. Only the aging Hall of Famer Jim Palmer, who went 15-5 with a 3.13 ERA was really steady. And these four pitchers combined to make 143 starts.

Weaver announced in March that 1982 would be his last season. Any motivational effect from the announcement was certainly delayed—the Orioles started the season 2-10 and though they stabilized after that, were still under .500 at 22-24 on Memorial Day. The good news was that first-place Boston was not seen as a long-term contender and the AL East's preseason favorite, the Milwaukee Brewers, were also flailing at 22-23 and had made a managerial change

It's also worth noting that just prior to Memorial Day, Ripken sat out the second game of a doubleheader. By the time he missed another game, Cal Ripken Jr. had set the new major league record for consecutive games played and gone down in history as "The Iron Man."

Baltimore swept three straight in Milwaukee in early June, starting a strong run of play against AL East rivals. The Orioles took four of five in two series with the Yankees. Baltimore won five of seven against Detroit. By the All-Star break they were 44-38, in third place and within 3 ½ games of the Red Sox.

The surge continued after the All-Star break. The Orioles won 10 of 13 games against AL West teams before it came to an end when they lost four straight in Kansas City to a good Royals team, scoring just seven runs in the process. It set the table for a rocky first part of August where Baltimore went through a 5-8 road trip.

On August 24, Weaver's last stretch drive began in earnest. It was the first game home in Memorial Stadium after the tough road trip. The Orioles and Blue Jays were tied 3-3 in the ninth. Baltimore had the bases loaded, two outs and catcher Joe Nolan hit a walkoff grand slam. It triggered a 12-1 run to Labor Day. The Orioles were three games back of the Brewers, with the Red Sox having slipped to third, four games out.

Over the next two weeks Boston fell by the wayside and the race narrowed to Baltimore and Milwaukee with a week and a half left. The teams would play seven times in the final ten games, starting with a three-game series in the Midwest on the penultimate weekend and then closing with four games in Memorial Stadium.

The Orioles were still three games out when this stretch started on a Friday night in Milwaukee. Baltimore came out attacking and scored four times in the top of the first, with a three-run homer by Lowenstein being the big blow. But Flanagan had nothing. He had given the lead back by the end of the third inning and a five-run fourth blew the game open for the Brewers. The Orioles lost 15-6.

Undaunted, Baltimore came out against eventual Cy Young winner Pete Vuckovich and again unloaded for four runs in the first inning. Again they got a three-run blast, this time from Murray. And Palmer made this one stand up with a complete-game four-hitter in a 7-2 win.

The Orioles continued to play well in the Sunday finale. Dauer and outfielder Dan Ford had three hits apiece to lead an attack that pounded out 13 hits. Murray homered again. The Martinez boys got it done on the mound, with Dennis working into the eighth and Tippy getting the final four outs. The 5-2 win pulled Baltimore to within two games entering the final week.

In what proved to be a crucial slip, the Orioles lost two of three in Detroit, while Milwaukee won two of three in Boston. The division margin was back to three games. So Earl's last homestand was simple—sweep all four and win the AL East. Lose once and be out.

The series started with a twilight doubleheader beginning shortly after 5 PM. Baltimore continued their pattern of attacking Milwaukee pitching early. They were up 5-1 on Vuckovich after four innings. Dauer again had a three-hit game and Singleton homered. The final was 8-3. It was just as easy in the nightcap. The Orioles got three runs in the first, with Murray going deep for a two-run blast. Storm Davis tossed a complete-game six-hitter and the final was 7-1.

Baltimore's fans were smelling the kill. They were bringing brooms and the chants of "Sweep! Sweep!" reverberated throughout the stadium locals still affectionately call "The House On 33rd Street." The Oriole hitters again gave the fans plenty to cheer about. Murray drilled an RBI double in the first inning and led the way to a quick 3-0 lead.

This time the Brewers rallied to tie it 3-3 in the fourth and Weaver pulled McGregor early. Sammy Stewart settled everything down. He threw 5 2/3 innings of two-hit baseball, while the Baltimore offense blasted forward undeterred. They grabbed four runs in their own half of the fourth, pulling back away as quickly as the game had become tied and the final was 11-3.

The Orioles were surging and the Brewers were collapsing. The brooms were back out in force for Sunday's nationally televised finale on ABC. Palmer was on the mound. Milwaukee had their own future Hall of Famer with over 300 career wins in Don Sutton. It was one of the truly memorable showdowns in MLB history just on that basis and Weaver's swan song only added to the drama.

Palmer just didn't meet the moment in this case—or more accurately, the Brewers' MVP shortstop Robin Yount did. He homered twice and tripled. Milwaukee led 5-1 in the eighth when Baltimore made one last push. They scored once and had runners on first and third.

Nolan laced a line drive into left field that looked destined for extra bases and likely two more runs. The Brewers' Ben Ogilvie made a spectacular sliding catch in the corner. The comeback had been turned back and Milwaukee tacked on five runs in the ninth to make sure.



Baltimore fans made sure the moment was still one of the truly great ones in baseball lore. In spite of the loss, they rose to their feet in a roaring ovation for their team and especially their manager. Milwaukee skipper Harvey Kuenn came out to congratulate Weaver. The crowd roared their approval and their love for Weaver. ABC's Howard Cosell, as cynical as they come, was overwhelmed by the moment. It was what sports, in its finest moments, is supposed to be about.

## 1983

The previous four years had been as frustrating as any. With a new manager on hand for 1983 in Joe Altobelli, Baltimore's players felt like it was win now or else. The city might have experienced a championship in 1970, but the current cast of players had not.

Baltimore was led by two future Hall of Famers in the everyday lineup. Shortstop Cal Ripken was in his second year, while first baseman Eddie Murray had developed into a perennial All-Star at age 27. Murray posted an on-base percentage of .393, hit 33 home runs and finished with 111 RBI. It was good for second in the American League MVP voting. Ripken wound up with a .371 OBP, 27 home runs, 102 RBI and won the MVP award.

Ken Singleton, playing some rightfield and also DH'ing, was another productive player, with a .393 OBP/.436 slugging percentage. Beyond that, it was depth that characterized the 1983 Baltimore Orioles, with solid veteran players who knew their roles.

Catcher Rick Dempsey was a terrific field leader. Left fielder Gary Roenicke was a productive bat and shared time with John Lowenstein, who had a knack for the key hit. Second baseman Rich Dauer was a very steady gloveman. Al Bumbry was reliable in center field and competent, if not spectacular at the top of the order. Jim Dwyer and Joe Nolan were good bats off the bench.

And the starting pitching, an Oriole staple going back to their first World Series title in 1966, had Scott McGregor, Mike Flanagan and young Mike Boddicker to anchor the rotation, with Storm Davis a reliable fourth. McGregor won 18 games with 3.18 ERA, while Boddicker won 16 with an ERA of 2.77. Davis logged 200 innings and was consistent, and Altobelli pieced together the rest of the rotation with Dennis Martinez, 26-year-old Allan Ramirez, and the aging 37-year-old Jim Palmer.

In the bullpen, Altobelli could turn to workhorses Sammy Stewart and Tippy Martinez, a good righty-lefty combo and each reliever in the old school tradition, who could throw 3-4 innings at a crack. Martinez saved 21 games, won nine more and finished with a 2.35 ERA. Stewart worked 144 innings and finished with a 3.62 ERA.

Baltimore started the season 23-13, mostly against AL West teams in the early portion of the schedule, but they lost seven in a row in a schedule stretch against the Toronto Blue Jays, Minnesota Twins, and the opener of a series with the Kansas City Royals. Fortunately, no one in the AL East really had traction and the Orioles' 25-21 record put them squarely in the mix of a race where six of the division's seven teams (everyone but the Cleveland Indians) were packed on top of each other.

The Orioles played two series with the Brewers in early June and won five of the six games. Baltimore spurred into first place and to a lead as big as four games. But they went 4-7 in the ensuing stretch of games with the Yankees and Detroit Tigers. When the early All-Star arrived on July 3, Baltimore was 42-34, and there were still six teams—the Orioles, Yankees, Tigers, Brewers, Red Sox and Blue Jays—within five games of each other.

Baltimore won 10 of 13 out of the break and were tied for first. They moved ahead by two games, but again couldn't stand prosperity. A seven-game losing streak followed, but still, no one was able to take control of the race. The Orioles only slipped a game back of Detroit and Milwaukee.

August 24 started a decisive stretch. Perhaps it's appropriate that the final push began with the Blue Jays, Twins and Royals, the same teams the Orioles slumped against in the spring. This time, Baltimore won 11 of 12 against these teams and got some separation in the AL East. They were 4 ½ games up by Labor Day, and the lead was still five games on September 9, with only the Yankees, Tigers and Brewers left to give chase.

Baltimore went to New York for a four-game weekend series. They lost the opener 5-3 when McGregor gave up a two-run shot to Yankee third baseman Graig Nettles in the eighth inning. The first game of a Saturday doubleheader was tied 2-2 in the ninth, when the Orioles broke it open with six runs, punctuated by a Lowenstein grand slam. Then they took the nightcap 3-1 behind seven strong innings from Boddicker. Baltimore finished the job on Sunday by scoring five times in the second inning and winning 5-3.

A series victory in Boston followed, and up next was four games at home with Milwaukee. Boddicker delivered another dominating start in the Friday opener to win 8-1. On Saturday, Bumbry got three hits and scored three runs in a 5-4 win. On Sunday, Palmer was hit hard and gave up seven runs in the second inning. But the Orioles came all the way back and it was tied 9-9 in the ninth inning.

Enter an unlikely hero. John Stefero was a backup catcher who had only 14 plate appearances in 1983 and just 210 for his career. He delivered a walkoff single to complete the 10-9 comeback win. What makes that especially noteworthy is that Stefero did it again on Sunday, with the walkoff hit in an 8-7 win.

Baltimore went to Detroit and split four games, but by this point, a split was as good as a sweep. There were just ten days left in the season after that series and the lead was 7 ½ games. The final nine games of the season—against Milwaukee, Detroit and New York—had promised drama, but would instead be a coronation ride for the Orioles, as they cruised into an AL East title with a record of 98-64.

## 1983 ALCS

The two best teams in baseball met in the 1983 ALCS, as the Baltimore Orioles and Chicago White Sox squared off. The Orioles had 98 wins and the White Sox had 99. The series was competitive throughout, the finale was outstanding and Baltimore prevailed to bring home a pennant.

The ALC would begin with two games in Baltimore on Wednesday and Thursday. It would end on the weekend in the South Side of Chicago.

LaMarr Hoyt had won 24 games for the White Sox and would win the Cy Young Award. He got the ball to face Baltimore's 18-game winner Scott McGregor in Game 1. Unsurprisingly, the game was a pitcher's duel throughout.

With two outs on the top of the third, Chicago got successive singles from Vance Law, Carlton Fisk and Tom Paciorek and took a 1-0 lead. In the sixth, Paciorek drew a walk and got to third on an error by first baseman Eddie Murray. McGregor induced a double-play ground ball from Ron Kittle, but Paciorek scored through the backdoor.

The White Sox missed golden opportunities to salt the game away in the seventh and eighth, as the Orioles cut down runners at the plate on infield grounders in both innings. That nearly proved costly in the bottom of the ninth. With two outs, Dan Ford doubled and scored on an RBI single by Cal Ripken. Murray had the chance to tie or win it, but Hoyt got him to ground out to short. The Chicago ace closed a five-hit complete game and a 2-1 win.



Another complete-game five-hitter followed in Game 2, as Baltimore's Mike Boddicker delivered with the pressure on his team. And Oriole left fielder Gary Roenicke had a huge night off Chicago's Floyd Bannister to provide the offense.

Roenicke doubled in the second inning, and then scored on a Law error. In the fourth, Roenicke walked and scored on a double by Ken Singleton. In the sixth, after Ripken doubled, Roenicke blasted a two-run shot. Chicago never threatened Boddicker until the ninth when they loaded the bases and brought the tying run to the plate in the person of light-hitting Julio Cruz. Boddicker struck him out and the 4-0 win was in the

books.

The White Sox were still in good position—the series was reduced to a best-of-three in Comiskey Park, and they had 22-game winner Richard Dotson on the mound in Friday's Game 3. And the specter of Hoyt in a potential Game 5 on Sunday loomed over the series.

No one was more aware of that than Baltimore, and they jumped on Dotson quickly. In the first inning, Jim Dwyer hit a one-out double, Ripken beat out an infield hit and Murray homered into the right-centerfield seats for a quick 3-0 lead. In the second, Rick Dempsey worked a one-out walk and scored on Al Bumbry's double.

Mike Flanagan was on the mound for Baltimore and gave up a leadoff double to Ron Kittle in the second inning that resulted in a Chicago run. It set the stage for fireworks on Kittle's next at-bat. In the fourth inning, on a 3-0 pitch, Flanagan hit Kittle in the kneecap. It knocked him out of the game and Chicago believed it was deliberate.

But the White Sox didn't handle the situation smartly. Dotson defended his hitter by plunking Ripken, and then throwing at Murray before walking him. The situation on the field was combustible, and for Chicago it got worse when Dotson gave up a two-run double to John Lowenstein. Any hope of a comeback was all but gone because LaRussa and Dotson didn't contain their desire for revenge. Baltimore blew the game open, winning 11-1.

Saturday afternoon's Game 4 had the feel of a decisive game. If Chicago won, it would be a McGregor-Hoyt rematch on Sunday. McGregor had a more accomplished career, and had pitched extremely well in the opener himself, so it's not as though Baltimore's cause would have been hopeless in a Game 5. But Hoyt was having one of those magical years where no opponent wanted to get near him. The Orioles wanted to close this series out before they had to see him again. The White Sox just wanted to get their ace the ball.

Chicago lefty Britt Burns and Baltimore's power righty Storm Davis put on a pitcher's duel of their own in Game 4. The Orioles missed chances in the second and sixth when they put the first two runners on, but failed to score. The White Sox missed a golden chance in the seventh. They also put the first two runners on. But a failed sac bunt was followed by Roenicke fielding a base hit and throwing out Law at the plate. The game went to extra innings still scoreless.

Tito Landrum was a reserve outfielder getting a start today for Baltimore against the lefty Burns, who was still in the game. With one out in the tenth, Landrum stunned everyone with a home run to left. That was immediately followed by singles from Ripken, Murray and Roenicke, scoring one run and then a sac fly tacked on one more.

The 3-0 lead was more than enough insurance for Tippy Martinez, the Oriole closer who had come on in the seventh inning, and he closed the door. For the second time in five years, Baltimore was going to the World Series.

Boddicker was named 1983 ALCS MVP for his dominating performance in Game 2. I think there were better candidates. Roenicke only played in three of the games, getting nine plate appearances. But he drew five walks and had three hits, including singlehandedly lifting the offense in Game 2 and making the huge defensive play of Game 4 that saved his team from facing Hoyt.

You could also make a case for Ripken, who hit .400, or Murray, who went 4-for-15, drew walks and hit the big home run to start Game 3.

## 1983 WORLD SERIES

The Baltimore Orioles and the Philadelphia Phillies were both nearing the end of the line when they met in the 1983 World Series. Both teams were filled with veterans. Philadelphia had enjoyed a strong run from 1976-81 and won a World Series in 1980. They had three members of the old Big Red Machine (1975-76 champions). The Orioles had enjoyed a lot of success, but their last title had been in 1970, a championship almost none of the '83 team had been around for.

The Series opened in Baltimore on a Tuesday night. John Denny won the NL Cy Young Award and was Philadelphia's starter in Game 1. Baltimore answered with their ace, Scott McGregor. In the ALCS, McGregor lost a pitcher's duel to the AL Cy Young winner, Chicago's Lamar Hoyt. This game would be *deja vu* for the Oriole lefty.

Baltimore got on the board right away when Jim Dwyer homered in the bottom of the first and McGregor cruised through five innings. But Denny was completely shutting down the Orioles and the Phils tied the game on a solo home run by Joe Morgan in the sixth. Then in the eighth, Gary Maddox hit a solo home run. Those three hits were the only real action of the entire night, and the Phils won 2-1.

Mike Boddicker had been in a similar situation in the ALCS—a must-win game at home—and the young Oriole righthander had pitched a shutout. He was almost as good in Game 2 of the World Series against the Phillies' Charles Hudson.

The game was scoreless through three, when Philadelphia got a soft run in the fourth. Morgan beat out an infield hit and stole second. He took third on an error by first baseman Eddie Murray and scored on a sac fly. The Baltimore offense finally got untracked in the bottom of the fifth when John Lowenstein homered to tie the game 1-1.

Baltimore kept coming in the fifth, with a single by Rich Dauer and Todd Cruz bunting his way on. Rick Dempsey ripped a double to make it 2-1 and put runners on second and third. Boddicker then did it with his bat—his line drive to left was caught, but it picked up the run. Baltimore added another run in the seventh on successive singles from John Shelby, Dan Ford and Cal Ripken and Boddicker cruised to a 4-1 win.

The "I-95 World Series" was in cities only an hour-plus apart, so everyone just took a quick ride north for the weekend in Philadelphia. On Friday night, two lefties with Cy Young Awards in their trophy case took the mound. Baltimore starter Mike Flanagan won the award in 1979. Philadelphia had Steve Carlton, with three Cy Youngs, over 300 career wins, a future place in Cooperstown and one of the best pitchers of his generation, at age 38.

Philadelphia got the early lead. Gary Matthews, hero of the NLCS win over the Los Angeles Dodgers, hit a solo shot in the second. Morgan did the same to lead off the third. Not until the fourth, did Baltimore start chipping at Carlton. A single and two walks loaded the bases with none out. But the veteran lefty got Murray to pop up and then induced Gary Roenicke to ground into an inning-ending double play.

Flanagan came out for a pinch-hitter in the top of the fifth and Baltimore brought out their own three-time Cy Young winner and future Hall of Famer. Jim Palmer, at age 37, was no longer his old self and was pitching out of the bullpen, but he put up zeroes in the fifth and sixth and enabled his team to rally.

Ford homered in the sixth to cut the lead in half. In the seventh, with two outs, Dempsey doubled. Benny Ayala came up to pinch-hit for Palmer and drove him in with a single. Carlton was removed for closer Al Holland.

Shelby singled, and then a huge error by shortstop Ivan de Jesus gave the Orioles the lead run. The Baltimore relief corps, Sammy Stewart and Tippy Martinez, slammed the door over the last three innings and the Orioles prevailed 3-2.

Saturday afternoon was sunny in Philadelphia and this World Series game was always played in the early afternoon prior to 1985, when all Series games had to be played in prime-time. With the Phils trailing, they went back to Denny on three days' rest, while the Orioles used their #4 starter, Storm Davis.

It was scoreless through three innings, and Baltimore started the fourth with three straight singles from Dwyer, Cal Ripken and Eddie Murray to load the bases. With one out, Rich Dauer singled in two runs and moved Murray to third. Denny bore down and struck out Todd Cruz, escaping the inning with the score still 2-0.

The Phils immediately answered in their own half of the fourth. With one out, Rose singled and Mike Schmidt dropped a blooper into left field. Joe Lefebvre doubled to score a run and set up second and third. After an intentional walk, Davis got a big double play grounder from Greg Gross and kept the 2-1 lead.

But Philadelphia kept coming in the fifth. Bo Diaz doubled to lead off the inning and Denny aided his own cause with a one-out single, taking second when the throw home went awry. With two outs, Rose doubled in Denny and Philly was up 3-2.

Now it was Baltimore's turn to punch back. A one-out single by Lowenstein was followed by a Dauer double and an intentional walk. Ken Singleton, normally the Oriole DH, was available to pinch-hit for Dempsey. Singleton drew a walk and the game was tied. Shelby picked up the lead run with a sac fly. One inning later, Dauer had another clutch hit, a two-out RBI single to drive in Dwyer, who had doubled.



Stewart and Martinez were again controlling the late innings, though the Phils made a move in the ninth. Diaz singled, was pinch-ran for by Bob Dernier, who took second on a ground ball out and scored on a two-out single. Morgan came up and hit a line drive, but Dauer capped off his big game by pulling it in and Baltimore's 5-4 victory had them one win from a title.

The Orioles had been here before though—in 1979. They weren't fitting themselves for rings just yet.

McGregor had suffered two hard-luck losses in this postseason and was just as ready to make good. After losing two straight pitchers' duels, the finesse-throwing lefty apparently decided the only way to be sure was to just give up nothing. And he dominated. Meanwhile, some quiet Baltimore bats opened up.

Eddie Murray had not been hitting in this Series, a subject of no small press attention, giving his disappearance in the final three games of the 1979 World Series. The pressure was growing on Murray, and he answered with a mammoth home run off Hudson in the second inning of Game 5. Dempsey homered in the third. After a Ripken walk started the fourth inning, Murray again unloaded a home run. Both of these were massive blasts that may not have come down until they arrived back in Baltimore.

Dempsey led off the fifth with a double, chasing Hudson, and then scored on a wild pitch and Bumbry sac fly. It was 5-0, and the 1983 World Series was all but over. McGregor went the distance and when Maddox hit a soft liner to Ripken to end the ninth inning, the party could start in Baltimore.

The 1983 World Series MVP honor went to Dempsey, for his 5-for-13 hitting and two home runs. Lowenstein also went 5-for-13 and homered, while McGregor worked 17 innings and gave up just two runs, including a clinching shutout. But I want to look somewhere else for Series MVP—how about Sammy Stewart?

The biggest difference in this World Series was that Stewart and Martinez controlled the last three innings in the close games of Games 3 & 4, and Stewart in particular threw five shutout innings in the Series overall. He got 4.1 of those innings in the Friday and Saturday games that all but secured the title. There was no one standout offensive performer—remember, Dempsey was pinch-hit for at the big moment of Game 4—and as well as McGregor pitched, he wasn't able to win Game 1. I'd give Stewart a narrow edge for this award.

1983 saw a lot of great players come together on the October stage one last time, and the end result was something they still call "Oriole Magic" in Baltimore.

## CONCLUSION

*Earl Weaver passed away in January 2013. Three months later, the Orioles honored him on Opening Day. This was the article posted on TheSportsNotebook.com at that time, giving him tribute. For our compilation here, its edited and trimmed-down version, will serve as the epilogue.*

Throwing out the first pitch on Opening Day is a special moment for every team on its home opener, but rarely—if ever—has a team done something as creative and touching as the Baltimore Orioles did for their Friday home opener. After keeping the identity of the person chosen secret throughout the offseason, when gametime arrived, the Orioles announced there would be no one. Instead, a ball was placed on the mound and a moment of silence called for the recently deceased Earl Weaver, with the crowd told that Earl would throw out the first pitch.

Earl Weaver took over the Orioles' managerial reins midway through the 1968 season and managed through 1982. He tried a brief, ill-fated comeback in the latter half of 1985 and in 1986, but it's the 1969-82 period that really defined the heart of his stewardship.

Younger fans are often familiar with Earl, from video footage of the colorful skipper kicking dirt on the umpires in his battles with the men in blue. Earl's flair was a big part of his appeal and his legend, and why he'll never be truly replaced, but it would be a big mistake if he were reduced to a caricature. Consider what the Orioles did under his leadership....

\*Excluding the 1985-86 comeback try, Earl won 59.6% of his games, averaging to more than 96 wins per year. To put that in perspective, only one team in baseball won 96 or more a year ago (in 2012). For Earl, 96 was the *average* over a 14-year period.

\*He won the American League East six times, and let's keep in mind that prior to the realignment of 1994 the East was at least six teams strong and became seven in the late 1970s. Furthermore, these races generally weren't close. In winning three straight divisions from 1969-71, Weaver's Orioles finished at least twelve games ahead of the competition, in spite of the fact that the runner-up won at least 90 games.

\*In four of those years, Baltimore went on to win the American League Championship Series. In fact, Baltimore won nine straight ALCS games from 1969-71 and only lost once in taking the 1979 pennant.

\*The World Series wasn't quite as kind to Earl, as Baltimore won one title—in 1970, when they combined with the Colts to give their home city a rare World Series-Super Bowl Parlay, but two of the losses came in seven-game sets. Ironically, both Game 7 defeats came to the Pittsburgh Pirates, providing the city of Baltimore a non-NFL related reason to loathe the Steel City.

This resume alone explains why Weaver was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1996 and was one of several Oriole legends honored last year with the unveiling of a statue likeness outside Camden Yards. But the winning alone doesn't quantify his impact on the game alone, or on the city he managed.

When Weaver was in charge, the Orioles struck terror in the hearts of rival AL East cities, and it was about more than the winning. It was because Weaver was a master at getting his team to play its best baseball after the All-Star break and even if Baltimore fell behind in a division race, a second-half surge was the surest thing this side of death and taxes.

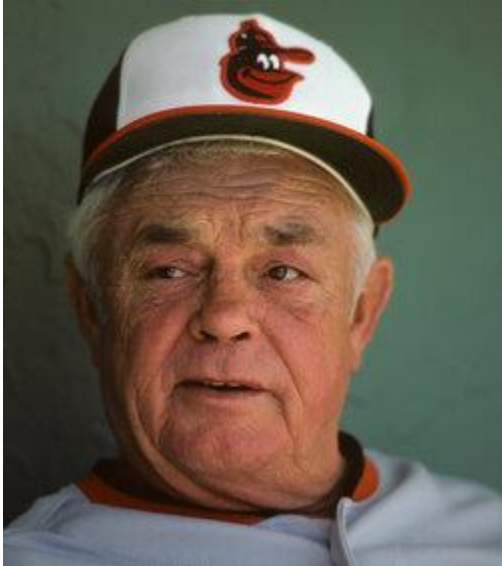
If we look at the 1969-82 timeframe, excluding the crazy strike year of 1981 when the season was split in half by a work stoppage, Earl's teams won 63.2% of their games after the All-Star break. That's a 102-win pace if you extrapolate over an entire year, and it's accomplished over a 14-year timeframe that encompasses generations of players, from Brooks Robinson to Cal Ripken Jr.

As a result, the fans of AL East teams who had a lead—even a healthy-size lead—had to keep in the habit of checking the rearview mirror at the orange-and-black car, lest it suddenly appear in their blindspot...A simple way of putting it would be that Earl was perhaps the only manager in baseball history who could make you feel like his team had a division race clinched if they were only three games out at the break.

We also can't overlook Earl's impact on the sports culture of Baltimore. The success of his teams, and his great flair, transformed Baltimore into something that's a rarity in this day and age, and that's a true baseball town. When Weaver arrived, Johnny Unitas and the Colts were the kings of Baltimore sports, and while Johnny U has his own rightful place in Baltimore lore, Earl's success—which ran parallel to more winning seasons from the Colts, including a Super Bowl victory—lifted Baltimore to the status of a town where baseball had first claim on the city's heart. Perhaps only St. Louis, Boston and Chicago's North Side are the only other places in America that can say this.

That part of Earl's legacy lives on to this day. Consider that current Oriole manager Buck Showalter was named Maryland Sportsman of the Year—in spite of the fact that the city's football team won the Super Bowl in honor of a colorful veteran (Ray Lewis) on his pre-announced "last ride." It's easy for cynics to point at bad attendance numbers prior to last year's turnaround, but if you see it up close, as I did for four years, it was easy to tell that the fans just wanted a reason to believe and put their time and money back into the Orioles. All part of Earl's legacy.

Finally, consider that Earl's record could easily look even better than it did. His championships—be it an AL East flag, an ALCS victory or a World Series title—were all decisive. But look at the crowns he just missed—two Game 7s in a World Series, the 1982 regular season finale and the 1973 American League playoffs, came down to a decisive fifth game with Oakland. What if Earl splits these four? That's at least one additional World Series title and perhaps more, as either his '73 or '82 teams would have been favored going forward.



Furthermore...by the standards of today, with its expanded postseasons, the Orioles would have gone into October play in 1975, 1976, 1977, 1980 and 1982. In all of those years, they were a team following the classic Weaver formula of gaining steam down the stretch.

We've seen in our day how momentum matters most in October and Earl's teams always had it. It's hardly unreasonable to think he would have won at least a couple more American League flags and another World Series.

Earl's ultimate impact, though, was not found in tallying up championships. It was the emotional bond he formed with a fan base. And that's why, even though he hadn't been in the dugout for 27 years, his

passing this January still inspired a team and city to let him "throw out the first pitch" on Opening Day.