

# Baseball Season Ends with Drama - Achievements of the Season

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After 161 games the San Francisco Giants entered game 162 knowing that they must win or go home and watch the Atlanta Braves in the playoffs and World Series. They fought back valiantly from their disastrous collapse in early September to win nine of ten games. They were on the verge of sweeping the Dodgers in a four game series, something they had not done since 1923.

With a weakened pitching staff the Giants relied on a three week veteran of major league baseball in the most pressure-packed game of the year. It was not likely to be a success.

It was such a lopsided victory that even Tommy LaSorda could not mess this one up, as he did on Friday night, and as he has done before. I kept seeing the ghost of Jack Clark coming to bat with first base open and runners on, and I just knew that he was going to hit it out. On Friday night Barry Bonds hit two out, the second one with first base open. Walk him Tommy. No. Boom. Bonds has two homers, drives in seven runs, Giants win 8-7. Was it Bonds or was it Clark. Maybe only Tommy knows. Twelve to one. Even Bonds can't hit a twelve run homer.

And Tommy really rubbed it in, saying that he wanted the Giant's fans to know what it was like in 1991, 1951, and 1962, and they would continue to feel the pain of the loss long after the Dodgers forgot the joy of victory. It's hard to remember that the Giants almost spent the season in the dreaded St. Petersburg White Elephant Dome.

For the eighth time in baseball history a team that won over 100 games is left out of post-season play. It was the first time since 1980. Some were mourning the coming of three divisions over the weekend, but not me. If there are two teams that win over 100 games they both ought to be the playoffs and now they will.

Some announcers and commentators were talking like there would never be another pennant race. Like there would never be another last day of the season when two teams would play to make it into the playoffs, or to decide a divisional champion. What are they talking about?

As for individual achievements, for the first time in twenty years there were two teams with two twenty game winners: Glavine and Maddux with the Braves, Burkett and Swift for the Giants.

Andres Gallaraga won the batting championship in the National League, the first time a player from an expansion team has done that. Barry Bonds had a fabulous season after signing his \$43.75M contract leading the league in home runs, rbi's, slugging percentage, on-base percentage, total bases, extra-base hits, and intentional walks. Can you spell MVP? Lenny Dykstra of the Phillies scored 143 runs the most since 1932, and led the league in hits and walks.

In the American League the Blue Jays had the three top hitters in the league with Olerud, Molitor, and Alomar. In his late thirties Paul Molitor had the best year of his career and brought some great leadership to Toronto. Frank Thomas fell one rbi short of the league lead and will be the MVP. Albert Belle was the rbi leader with a little help from his friends. Juan Gonzales of the Rangers had 46 homers to lead the league despite missing a few weeks with back problems. Dave Winfield passed the 3000th hit playing in his hometown, almost.

It was a season that saw one of the greatest comebacks since Nixon in '68. Bo Jackson, who was told he would never play again, not only played but put up some impressive home run and rbi numbers playing part-time, and playing in the field. Other notable individual achievements were the no-hitters by Chris Bosio, Darryl Kile, and Jim Abbott; Randy Johnson's 308 strikeouts; and Mark Whitten's four home run and 12 rbi game.

It was a season in which attendance records fell like Latin American governments. The Colorado Rockies broke all records with 4.5M and the Marlins were just over 3M. Six other teams broke their own attendance records, and seven teams drew over 3M fans. Total attendance 70.2M. The previous record was 56.8M. Even after adjusting for expansion and the new way in which the National League counted its attendance, it was still an all-time record year.

So we enter the playoffs with the White Sox and Phillies the newcomers and underdogs. There may be a repeat of last year's World Series matchup, but I have a hunch that the White Sox are a sleeper and they will meet the Braves in the Series, only to lose to the best pitching rotation in several decades and maybe the best ever.

What a great season! Is there anyone at all who remembers that there is no Baseball Commissioner?

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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