

# Oakland sweeps Sox, in Series

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — The Oakland Athletics, showing off the pitching and power that made them baseball's winningest team, completed a four-game sweep in the American League playoffs by beating the Boston Red Sox 4-1 Sunday.

Jose Canseco, the major league leader in home runs, tied an AL playoff record with his third home run of the series. Dennis Eckersley, the leader in saves, set a major league playoff mark with his fourth save as he finished a four-hitter for Dave Stewart and Rick Honeycutt.

The Athletics returned to the World Series for the first time since 1974. Game 1 will be Saturday night in either New York or Los Angeles.

Oakland posted the first four-game sweep since 1976, when Cincinnati's Big Red Machine rolled over the New York Yankees in the World Series. The Athletics also got some long-due revenge against Boston, which swept Oakland out of the 1975 playoffs and ended its run of three consecutive championships.

The Red Sox, whose longest losing string during the regular season was four games, picked a bad time to duplicate that streak. The Athletics dominated Boston this year, going 13-3 and winning all eight in Oakland, giving them 15 victories over the Red Sox in the last 16 meetings in Oakland.

Canseco, the major league home run leader with 42, hit a solo shot in the first inning and tied George Brett's AL playoff record. Canseco has hit five home runs in 26 career at-bats against loser Bruce Hurst, including one in Game 1.

Stewart made the early lead stand up, allowing only Jim Rice's RBI grounder in the sixth. Stewart left after Ellis Burks' leadoff single in the eighth and Honeycutt immediately got Marty Barrett to ground into a double play. Eckersley pitched the ninth to get his fourth save in as many games.

Dwight Evans, the only player on either team who participated in Boston's 1975 playoff victory over Oakland, did not help the Red Sox. He struck out with the bases loaded to end the first inning — he was 6-for-12 with the bases loaded in the regular season — and fanned with the tying run on second base to end the sixth.

Oakland won an AL West-record 104 games, one season after Minnesota won the pennant with 85 victories. The Athletics' sweep marked for the first time since division play began in 1969 that two different AL West teams have gone to the World Series in successive years.

Boston, whose 89 victories were the fewest for any AL East title in a full season, lost its final three games of the year and continued to wobble. Manager Joe Morgan, a miracle worker after inheriting a fourth-place team when John McNamara was fired at the All-Star break, could do little as the Red Sox fell.

Canseco, the only hitless Oakland player in a 10-6 romp in Game 3, struck back with vengeance. He went 3-for-4 with a homer and double to wind up 5-for-16 in the series.

Canseco, the first player to hit 40

## Cry me a river, Mets fans; the A's are just a cut above

With no home game this weekend, and no money for a road trip to Houston, I figured I'd watch a little baseball. What I ended up watching instead was the Oakland Athletics.

It took almost 15 years to reconstruct the team that Charley Finley's red pen decimated in the mid-'70s. But it has finally happened.

The A's are back — with a vengeance. Player-for-player, I don't know if you could equate this year's team with the team from 1974. Would you take Jose Canseco, Dave Stewart, Terry Steinbach and Dennis Eckersley over Reggie Jackson, Catfish Hunter, Gene Tenace and Rollie Fingers? Probably not.

But the weekend proved more than adequately that the 1988 A's are more than adequate to take care of the best team the American League East could throw at them.

I don't mean to infer that the Red Sox aren't a quality baseball team. It's just that this weekend served notice to the fact we all wanted to deny this season: The A's are simply in a class of their own in the American League. And I have every confidence they will erase the "in the American League" qualifier when they meet the Mets in the World Series.

More on the Mets later. The A's simply do it all. The mark of a truly great team is completeness, and the A's have it. They don't care how they beat you.

They win pitching duels. They win slugfests. They win nail-biters. They win blowouts. They win... they win. Skeptics abounded when Oakland was threatening to clinch the American League West by Memorial Day.

"They won't last. They'll pull a 'Texas Rangers' on us around August."

Fraid not. These guys are for real. It looked over as early as Game One, when they beat Bruce "13-2 in Fenway" Hurst. In Fenway. It looked over quick after Game Two, when they completed the Boston Massacre. It looked like a sweep after Game Three, when the Sox watched an early five-run lead disappear in a barrage of cannon shots into the partisan seats.

It looked just plain pointless in Game Four. The game was close throughout, but the outcome was certain as soon as Canseco's homer left his bat in the bottom of the first, giving the A's a narrow lead that would never disappear. The only question remaining is, "Can they make it look



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Columnist

as easy against the Mets?"

And cool your jets, all you Dodger fans out there. It may not officially be over, and I hate the Mets as much as you, but L. A. blew it in Game One. If you put Orel Hershiser on the mound at home in the opener and lose, it's over.

The scene was set: The man with the 59-inning scoreless streak had kept the game tight. Now there were two men on, sure; but it was the top of the ninth, two men were out, two strikes were on the batter, the ace reliever was on the mound, and Gary Carter was at bat. What more could a Dodger fan ask for?

You could ask for a win, that's what. Ask this Astro if the Mets have some mystical force that makes good things happen in critical situations.

The Mets just manage to do it. Much like the A's, they find a way to win. Gary Carter's blooper that won Game One is proof of that.

In fact, the teams are remarkably similar in that respect. You get the feeling that neither one of them is ever out of a game. The threat of gunfire from Strawberry, Hernandez and McReynolds compares pretty well with that of Canseco, McGwire and Lansford.

They look pretty even on paper. Can the Mets do it? Can the team everyone picked to win it all in April come through in October?

Don't count on it. This year has been Oakland's since May, and it's no fluke or error. The Oakland Athletics are simply the best team in baseball. The Mets are good, and they should keep it close, but they won't make it.

My prediction: The A's in five. Maybe six.

home runs and steal 40 bases in the same season, singled in the eighth against Lee Smith, stole second and scored on Mark McGwire's single.

Oakland's other run came in the third. Walt Weiss and Carney Lansford singled and Dave Henderson, Boston's playoff hero in 1986, hit an RBI double. The Athletics missed a chance to break open the game in that inning as Hurst got Canseco on a short fly, intentionally walked McGwire to load the bases and retired Dave Parker and Terry Steinbach.

That was enough, though, to the delight of 49,406 fans that chanted "sweep, sweep," throughout the sunny afternoon. Many in the crowd came carrying brooms to help whisk away the Red Sox.

Oakland led the league with a 3.42 earned-run average and was second to Boston with 800 runs. The Athletics out-homered the Red Sox 13-1 in head-to-head meetings during the season and 7-2 in the playoffs.

The Athletics also continued to sparkle on defense. Second baseman Mike Gallego starred this time, making a nice play on Rice's run-scoring grounder to prevent Boston from doing more damage.

Barrett opened the sixth with a walk and took second on Wade Boggs' single. Mike Greenwell's force out put runners at first and third and Rice followed with

a hard ground ball that seemed destined for center field until it hit the mound and popped up in the air.

Gallego charged into the middle of the infield, gloved the ball and threw across his body to nip Rice. Barrett scored on the play, but that was all Boston got as Evans struck out.

Stewart got two outs to start the game before Boggs walked, Greenwell singled and Rice walked to load the bases. Stewart blew a fastball past Evans to end the threat.

Hurst got the first two outs before Canseco hit a line drive into the right-center field seats. During batting practice, Canseco hit a drive that traveled an estimated 550 feet.

# Gibson homer in 12th nips Mets

NEW YORK (AP) — Kirk Gibson homered with two outs in the 12th inning and Orel Hershiser, who twice failed to win games as a starter, got the final out as the Los Angeles Dodgers beat the New York Mets 5-4 to even the National League playoffs at two games apiece.

Hershiser, called into a bases-loaded, two-out situation as the seventh Dodgers pitcher of the day, got Kevin McReynolds on a pop fly to center fielder John Shelby.

Alejandro Pena got the victory with three innings of hitless relief as the Dodgers played without reliever Jay Howell.

Howell was suspended Sunday for using an illegal substance in his glove. Howell, who led the Dodgers with 21 saves, was ejected in the eighth inning of Game 3 on Saturday when pine tar was found on the heel of his glove.

Howell was suspended for three days by NL president Bart Giamatti and would be eligible for Game 7, if the series goes that far.

Game 5 of the best-of-seven series is scheduled Monday at 12:08 p.m. EDT, giving the teams less than 12 hours to recover.

Left-hander Sid Fernandez will pitch against rookie Tim Lincecum, winner of Game 2 at Los Angeles. Mets starter Dwight Gooden carried a three-hit, 4-2 lead into the ninth inning.

But Gooden, who had walked four, thrown two wild pitches and committed a balk, got into trouble again when he walked Shelby leading off the inning.

Then Dodgers catcher Mike Sciosia homered into the right-field bullpen to tie it.

It was the Dodgers' first home run in 47 innings, including the last 13 innings of the regular season.

The Mets rallied for victories in Games 1 and 3, but this time it was the Dodgers' turn.

Reliever Roger McDowell got the first two outs in the 12th before Gibson homered deep over the right field fence to break a 1-for-16 playoff batting slump. Gibson, who has been playing with a painful hamstring strain, led the Dodgers with 25 homers but hadn't homered since Sept. 11.

Tim Lary, a 17-game winner for the Dodgers, attempted to close out the game in the bottom of the 12th.

But Mackey Sasser and pinch-hitter Lee Mazzilli singled to lead off the inning.

Gregg Jefferies, after failing to get down a sacrifice bunt, flied out to left and former Met Jesse Orosco relieved.

Orosco walked Keith Hernandez on a 3-2 count to load the bases, then got Darryl Strawberry on a popout to second.

That brought on Hershiser for only his second relief appearance this season.

The 23-game winner earned a save May 10 at Chicago in a 14-inning, 6-5 victory.

The loss broke a streak of three consecutive postseason extra inning victories for the Mets, who have played the four longest playoff games in NL history — three of 12 innings and another of 16 innings.

Darryl Strawberry and Kevin McReynolds hit consecutive home runs off John Tudor in the fourth inning to give New York a 3-2 lead.

Keith Hernandez led off the fourth off Tudor with a bloop single to right field and Strawberry tied the score with a home run into the right-field bullpen on a 1-0 pitch.

Strawberry, who hit 20 of his league-leading 39

home runs against left-handers, is 9-for-34 with two homers lifetime against Tudor in regular season play.

McReynolds broke an 0-for-12 streak in the playoffs when he followed Strawberry with a homer over the 371-foot sign in left field.

During the regular season, Strawberry and McReynolds homered in the same game eight times.

Tudor was chased in the sixth inning when McReynolds led off with a double and scored when Gary Carter tripled over Shelby's head in center field.

Tudor, touched for eight hits and a walk in five-plus innings, was relieved by Brian Holton, who stranded Carter at third by striking out Tim Teufel, walking Kevin Elster and getting Gooden to hit into a double play.

Tudor was scheduled to start Game 2 at Los Angeles last Wednesday but was scratched because of leg spasms suffered in his last start of the season on Sept. 30. He got another day of rest when Friday's Game 2 at Shea Stadium was rained out.

The Dodgers went with Orel Hershiser when Game 3 was set back to Saturday.

The Dodgers took a 2-0 lead in the first inning as Gooden and forced the Mets to come from behind once again.

New York rallied for three runs in the ninth inning for a 3-2 victory in Game 1 and beat the Dodgers 8-4 in Game 3 with five runs in the eighth.

In the first four innings, the Dodgers got a runner's third three times without scoring.

As happened in Game 1, Gooden got into trouble in the first inning Sunday night, when he yielded a two-out, two-run single to Shelby.

One out after Sciosia's homer, Alfredo Griffin obliged to finish Gooden's bid for his first postseason victory in six starts.

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