

1976

Free agency arrives as Finley, Kuhn battle and Bench leads Reds

Owners resorted to a spring-training lockout after an arbitrator ruled during the winter that pitchers Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally were entitled to free agency and that the reserve clause had seen its day. Los Angeles owner Walter O'Malley's attempt to blacklist the hurlers was thwarted when Atlanta signed Messersmith and McNally retired. A subsequent agreement stipulated free-agency rights would kick in after six years of major league service.

In the AL East, the Yankees celebrated their return to their Bronx stadium by taking their first division title, behind MVP Thurman Munson (.302-17-105), home-run leader Graig Nettles (32), Ed Figueroa's 19 wins, and Sparky Lyle's 23 saves. New York's rotation would have been stronger if not for Commissioner Bowie Kuhn's veto of Oakland's proposed sale of Vida Blue to the Yankees. According to Kuhn, neither that deal nor the attempt by A's owner Charlie Finley to sell Joe Rudi and Rollie Fingers to Boston were in the "best interests of baseball." Finley's would-be fire sale of stars and his initial refusal to take them back after Kuhn's intervention provided just enough room for Kansas City to back into the AL West title.

The Royals also claimed the batting title for the year in George Brett (.333), but there was significant suspicion the honor should have gone to teammate Hal McRae. The difference was a misjudged fly ball by Minnesota outfielder Steve Brye in the ninth inning of the final game that was ruled an inside-the-park-home run for Brett. McRae accused Twins manager Gene Mauch of playing Brye out of position deliberately so a white man could win the batting crown. Lee May of the Orioles had the most RBIs (109), teammate Jim Palmer the most wins (22) and Mark Fidrych of the Tigers the lowest ERA (2.34). Fidrych, dubbed The Bird for a resemblance to a "Sesame Street" character, galvanized national attention for mound antics that included talking to the ball.

In the NL East, the Phillies knocked off the Pirates behind a circuit-best 38 homers from Mike Schmidt, Steve Carlton's 20 wins, and John Denny's 2.52 ERA. Joe Morgan (.320-27-111), George Foster (.306 with 29 homers and an NL-best 121 RBIs) and Rawley Eastwick (11 wins and 26 saves) helped Cincinnati coast in the NL West. Chicago's Bill Madlock won the hitting title (.339), San Diego's Randy Jones had the most wins (22).

The Reds had their problems with outfielder Jay Johnstone (7-for-9), but they handled the rest of the Phillies for a three-game NLCS sweep. The far more intense ALCS came down to a seesaw fifth game in which Brett clouted a tying three-run homer in the eighth inning, only to see New York first baseman Chris Chambliss



Big Bird and Mark Fydrich

The baseball world was captivated by Fydrich's colorful style and sparkling 2.34 ERA for the Detroit Tigers in the only complete season of his injury-shortened career.

lead off the ninth with his eleventh hit, second homer, and eighth RBI of the series.

The World Series was another Cincinnati blowout, with the Yankees going down in four straight. Led by Johnny Bench's eight hits and six RBIs, the Reds were so tidy about the rout that they sent only nine batters to the plate during the Series. New York's satisfaction came a few weeks later in the signing of Cincinnati ace Don Gullett as a free agent.

1976 SEASON HIGHLIGHTS

NATIONAL LEAGUE

	W	L	Pct.	GB
East				
Philadelphia	101	61	.623	—
Pittsburgh	92	70	.568	9
New York	86	76	.531	15
Chicago	75	87	.463	26
St. Louis	72	90	.444	29
Montreal	55	107	.340	46
West				
Cincinnati	102	60	.630	—
Los Angeles	92	70	.568	10
Houston	80	82	.494	22
San Francisco	74	88	.457	28
San Diego	73	89	.451	29
Atlanta	70	92	.432	32

AMERICAN LEAGUE

	W	L	Pct.	GB
East				
New York	97	62	.610	—
Baltimore	88	74	.543	10.5
Boston	83	79	.512	15.5
Cleveland	81	78	.509	16
Detroit	74	87	.460	24
Milwaukee	66	95	.410	32
West				
Kansas City	90	72	.556	—
Oakland	87	74	.540	2.5
Minnesota	85	77	.525	5
Texas	76	86	.469	14
California	76	86	.469	14
Chicago	64	97	.398	25.5

AWARDS

NL MVP: Joe Morgan, CIN
AL MVP: Thurman Munson, NYY
NL Cy Young: Randy Jones, SDP
AL Cy Young: Jim Palmer, BAL
NL Rookie: Butch Metzger, SDP; Pat Zachry, CIN
AL Rookie: Mark Fidrych, DET
NL Relief Pitcher: Rawly Eastwic, CIN
AL Relief Pitcher: Bill Campbel, MIN
GOLD GLOVES
NL: Jim Kaat, P; Johnny Bench, C; Steve Garvey, 1B; Joe Morgan, 2B; Mike Schmidt, 3B;
 Dave Concepcion, SS; Garry Maddox, Cesar Cedeno, Cesar Geronimo, OF
AL: Jim Palmer, P; Jim Sundberg, C; George Scott, 1B; Bobby Grich, 2B; Aurelio Rodriguez, 3B; Mark Belanger, SS; Dwight Evans, Joe Rudi, Rick Manning, OF

ALL-STAR GAME

Veterans Stadium, Philadelphia
 July 13: NL 7, AL 1

MVP: George Foster, Cincinnati Reds

POST-SEASON

WORLD SERIES

Cincinnati Reds 4, New York Yankees 0

Oct. 16: CINCINNATI 5, New York 1
 Oct. 17: CINCINNATI 4, New York 3
 Oct. 19: Cincinnati 6, NEW YORK 2
 Oct. 21: Cincinnati 7, NEW YORK 2

MVP: Johnny Bench, Cincinnati

NATIONAL LEAGUE

NLCS

Cincinnati Reds 3, Philadelphia Phillies 0

Oct. 9: Cincinnati 6, PHILADELPHIA 3
 Oct. 10: Cincinnati 6, PHILADELPHIA 2
 Oct. 12: CINCINNATI 7, Philadelphia 6

AMERICAN LEAGUE

ALCS

New York Yankees 3, Kansas City Royals 2

Oct. 9: New York 4, KANSAS CITY 1
 Oct. 10: KANSAS CITY 7, New York 3
 Oct. 12: NEW YORK 5, Kansas City 3
 Oct. 13: Kansas City 7, NEW YORK 4
 Oct. 14: NEW YORK 7, Kansas City 6

“When you’re a winner you’re always happy, but if you’re happy as a loser you’ll always be a loser.”

—Mark Fidrych

Home team in CAPS

NATIONAL LEAGUE LEADERS

Home Runs

Schmidt-Phi	38
Kingman-NY	37
Monday-Chi	32
Foster-Cin	29
Morgan-Cin	27

Runs Batted In

Foster-Cin	121
Morgan-Cin	111
Schmidt-Phi	107
Watson-Hou	102
Luzinski-Phi	95

Batting Average

Madlock-Chi	.339
Griffey-Cin	.336
Maddox-Phi	.330
Rose-Cin	.323
Morgan-Cin	.320

On Base Percentage

Morgan-Cin	.453
Madlock-Chi	.415
Rose-Cin	.406
Griffey-Cin	.403
Cey-LA	.389

Slugging Average

Morgan-Cin	.576
Foster-Cin	.530
Schmidt-Phi	.524
Monday-Chi	.507
Kingman-NY	.506

Stolen Bases

Lopes-LA	63
Morgan-Cin	60
Taveras-Pit	58
Cedeno-Hou	58
Brock-StL	56

Wins

Jones-SD	22
Sutton-LA	21
Koosman-NY	21
Richard-Hou	20
Carlton-Phi	20

Innings Pitched

Jones-SD	315.1
Richard-Hou	291.0
Seaver-NY	271.0
Niekro-Atl	270.2
Sutton-LA	267.2

Saves

Eastwick-Cin	26
Lockwood-NY	19
Forsch-Hou	19
Hough-LA	18
Metzger-SD	16

Strikeouts

Seaver-NY	235
Richard-Hou	214
Koosman-NY	200
Carlton-Phi	195
Niekro-Atl	173

Earned Run Average

Denny-StL	2.52
Rau-LA	2.57
Seaver-NY	2.59
Koosman-NY	2.69
Zachry-Cin	2.74

Complete Games

Jones-SD	25
Koosman-NY	17
Matlack-NY	16
Sutton-LA	15
Richard-Hou	14

AMERICAN LEAGUE LEADERS

Home Runs

Nettles-NY	32
R.Jackson-Bal	27
Bando-Oak	27

Runs Batted In

L.May-Bal	109
Munson-NY	105
Yastrzemski-Bos	102

Batting Average

Brett-KC	.333
McRae-KC	.332
Carew-Min	.331
Bostock-Min	.323
LeFlore-Det	.316

On Base Percentage

McRae-KC	.412
Hargrove-Tex	.401
Carew-Min	.398
Staub-Det	.392
Carty-Cle	.384

Slugging Average

R.Jackson-Bal	.502
Rice-Bos	.482
Nettles-NY	.475
Lynn-Bos	.467
Carew-Min	.463

Stolen Bases

North-Oak	75
LeFlore-Det	58
Campaneris-Oak	54
Baylor-Oak	52
Patek-KC	51

Wins

Palmer-Bal	22
Tiant-Bos	21
Garland-Bal	20

Innings Pitched

Palmer-Bal	315.0
Hunter-NY	298.2
Blue-Oak	298.1
Blyleven-Min-Tex	297.2
Slaton-Mil	292.2

Saves

Lyle-NY	23
LaRoche-Cle	21
Fingers-Oak	20
Campbell-Min	20
Littell-KC	16

Strikeouts

Ryan-Cal	327
Tanana-Cal	261
Blyleven-Min-Tex	219
Eckersley-Cle	200
Hunter-NY	173

Earned Run Average

Fidrych-Det	2.34
Blue-Oak	2.35
Tanana-Cal	2.43
Torrez-Oak	2.50
Palmer-Bal	2.51

Complete Games

Fidrych-Det	24
Tanana-Cal	23
Palmer-Bal	23

THE YEAR IN BASEBALL

January 6: Ted Turner buys Braves for \$11 million.

March 11: Larry Gardner dies.

March 21: Toronto granted AL franchise for 1977.

April 10: At Milwaukee, Yanks lead 9-6 into bottom of ninth. Sparky Lyle gives up a grand slam to Don Money, but first base ump James McKean says he had called timeout before pitch—Milwaukee loses, 9-7.

April 15: Renovated Yankee Stadium is jammed with 52,613 fans for Opening Day ceremonies.

May 29: Joe Niekro hits the only home run of his career—off his brother Phil.

June 22: Pitcher Randy Jones ties Christy Mathewson's 63-year-old NL record by going 68 innings without allowing a base on balls.

July 20: Hank Aaron hits the 755th—and last—home run of his career.

September 12: Minnie Minoso becomes oldest player to get a hit in a regulation game. He was almost 54 at the time.

September 29: After 23 years and 2,040 victories, Walter Alston steps down as Dodgers' manager.

October 14: Yankees win pennant on Chris Chambliss' ninth inning homer off Kansas City's Mark Littell in Game Five of AL Playoffs.

November 4: First free-agent draft is held, Montreal selects Reggie Jackson with first choice.

November 29: Yankees sign free agent outfielder Reggie Jackson for \$3.5 million dollars.