



Press Clips

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FROM THE ATHLETIC**The worst team I ever covered: MLB writers on Reggie Jackson's threat, a Super Soaker full of bleach and Mr. F-cking Popularity**

By Richard Deitsch

There's an old sportswriting axiom that states the best stories reside in the losing locker room.

I've never bought that as an absolute, but for this week I am embracing the insufferable, the miserable, the worst of the worst.

When I worked at Sports Illustrated, one of my titles was special projects editor, and part of that charter was to get the staff involved in projects across multiple sports. One of those projects was a series on the 25 Most Hated Teams in Sports History. That ended up spawning additional pieces, including the worst NBA teams our writers had covered during their careers.

Since then, I've always wanted to do a similar project, and this week *The Athletic* will unveil essays from some terrific sports media people (including from some colleagues at *The Athletic*) on the worst team they've covered as a professional.

Below, the list of insufferable teams and the person who covered (endured) it.

NFL (Monday)

- 1990 Denver Broncos (Adam Schefter)
- 1994 Dallas Cowboys (Dale Hansen)
- 2000 & 2001 San Diego Chargers (Jim Trotter)
- 2003 New York Giants (Tara Sullivan)
- 2010 Denver Broncos (Lindsay Jones)
- 2012 New York Jets (Kimberley A. Martin)
- 2012 Philadelphia Eagles (Les Bowen)
- 2016 Jacksonville Jaguars (Ryan O'Halloran)
- 2017 Indianapolis Colts (Stephen Holder)

NHL (Tuesday)

- 2003-04 Pittsburgh Penguins (Trenni Kusnierek)
- 2005-06 St. Louis Blues (Jeremy Rutherford)
- 2007-08 Atlanta Thrashers (Craig Custance)
- 2009-10 Toronto Maple Leafs (James Mirtle)
- 2010-11 New York Islanders (Katie Strang)
- 2011-12 Columbus Blue Jackets (Aaron Portzline)
- 2013-14 Vancouver Canucks (Jason Botchford)
- 2014-15 Buffalo Sabres (John Vogl)

MLB (Wednesday)

- 1986 California Angels (Gene Wojciechowski)
- 1988 Baltimore Orioles (Richard Justice)
- 1993 New York Mets (Frank Isola)
- 1995 Oakland A's (Pedro Gomez)
- 1998 Florida Marlins (Dave O'Brien)
- 2002 Chicago Cubs (Teddy Greenstein)
- 2012-16 New York Yankees (Marly Rivera)
- 2018 Kansas City Royals (Rustin Dodd)

NBA/WNBA (Thursday)

- 1992-93 Washington Bullets (David Aldridge)
- 1998-99 Cleveland Cavaliers (Jason Lloyd)
- 2005-06 Portland Trail Blazers (John Canzano)
- 2005-06 New York Knicks (Howard Beck)
- 2007-08 Golden State Warriors (Tim Kawakami)
- 2008-09 Los Angeles Clippers (Lisa Dillman)
- 2011 Tulsa Shock (Kelly Hines)
- 2013-14 Los Angeles Lakers (Dave McMenamin)
- 2014-15 Brooklyn Nets (Tim Bontemps)
- 2015-16 Philadelphia 76ers (Derek Bodner)

Colleges (Friday)

- 1994 Kentucky Football (Pat Forde)
- 1997 Maryland Football (Seth Emerson)
- 2002 Stanford Football (Jon Wilner)
- 2002-03 Villanova Basketball (Dana O'Neil)
- 2008 Washington Football (Ted Miller)
- 2014 Michigan Football (Angelique Chengelis)
- 2015 Idaho Football (Michael Shawn-Dugar)

Let us know in the comments below if you have a particular team that stands out as the worst for you. And, please, enjoy the misery:

Gene Wojciechowski, ESPN

For pure daily dread, there was nothing like covering the **1986 California Angels** for the LA Times. Mike Penner was the lead beat reporter, I was the backup. It was a team with Hall of Famers (Reggie Jackson, Don Sutton), troubled souls (Donnie Moore), odd souls (Brian Downing) and legends (manager Gene Mauch). But if you showed any weakness at all—and I mean the least bit of sensitivity or defensiveness—the fellas in that clubhouse would feed you into the wood chip machine.

When Reggie misplayed a line drive during a game, I wrote that the only way he'd win a Gold Glove is if he sprayed painted it himself. The next day I made sure to stand near the batting cage so he could see me and vent. Reggie tore into me so loudly and passionately that the Red Sox players came from their clubhouse to watch the spectacle. At one point he said he ought to kick my ass, and I stupidly said

something like, “Well, let’s do it then.” Like I said, you couldn’t back down to those guys—even if it meant humiliation in front of two big-league lineups and the stadium ushers.

Mauch eventually stepped in, but the truth is, I took a shot at Reggie, so it was only right that he could take a shot at me.

That was the same year a beat reporter for one of the other papers burst into Mauch’s office after Mauch had concluded his postgame interview. The reporter pleaded with Mauch to talk to him, said that he was up against deadline. Mauch looked at the reporter and said, “There are two things I don’t give a shit about: tits on a man, and your deadline.” But he gave the guy the interview.

I covered the 1996 Cubs for the Chicago Tribune. Sammy Sosa, Mark Grace, Scott Servais, Doug Glanville, Luis Gonzalez, Jim Riggleman as the manager. Sosa was becoming His Samminess, which is to say, insufferable. Gracie, Servais, Glanville, Gonzo were stand-up guys. The last time they were in first was May 13th, and then they began the slow slide into irrelevancy. Late in the season, the Tribune pulled me off the Cubs and assigned me to the Summer Olympics in Atlanta. So on my last day covering the team, I stopped by the lockers of a few of the players who had been especially helpful to me during the season. When I got to Grace’s locker, he was sipping on a postgame beer and staring at the ground.

“Gracie, just wanted to thank you for everything,” I said.

He looked up. “Where in the hell are you going?”

“They’re pulling me off to cover the Olympics.”

Grace took a swig from the beer, and then, his voice softening, said, “Can I come too?”

Richard Justice, MLB.com

Terry Kennedy, a catcher with the **1988 Orioles**—you know them as the 0-21 1988 Orioles—had just finished his interview for an MLB Network documentary on the team when I showed up at the Valley Ho Hotel in Scottsdale, Arizona last spring and settled into the chair he’d just occupied.

I noticed a folded towel on the floor in front of the chair.

“Do you want me to put my feet on this towel,” I asked a producer.

“When (Kennedy) started reliving that season, he would start pounding the floor with his feet,” the producer said. “We put the towel down there so the sound wouldn’t be picked up by the cameras.”

Months later, I asked Kennedy, a scout for the Cubs, about this.

“Yeah,” he said, “that’s something you don’t get over.”

Fred Lynn, the centerfielder, told the filmmakers that this was his first interview about 1988, and that it would be his last.

Such is the pain still associated with a baseball team that had maybe the most embarrassing three weeks ever.

0-21.

Think about that. Roll it over in your mind. 0-21 does not happen. Ever. It can't. It did. These Orioles were not tanking. On Opening Day, they believed they would be competitive.

That was before outfielder Jim Dwyer arrived in Chicago with a pizza with ingredients in the outline of a crucifix. That was before President Reagan telephoned manager Frank Robinson to say, "Frank, I know what you're going through."

"Mr. President," Frank said, "with all due respect, you have no idea."

That tidbit was delivered by Frank himself at the end of dinner with the beat writers—Tim Kurkjian of the Baltimore Morning Sun, Ken Rosenthal of the Baltimore Evening Sun and me, then with the Washington Post—in Minneapolis.

The Orioles were 0-18 at the time, and the team had now attracted a playoff-size media throng to chronicle every misplay, every strikeout.

During that dinner, Frank had painfully gone through his roster player by player and when he finished, Kurkjian said, "So, Frank, you're saying you hate all your players except for the two Ripkens (Cal and Billy)?"

Frank shrugged.

When things got bad—eight losses? nine? A dozen?—general manager Roland Hemond had his previous employer, the Chicago White Sox, ship him the framed, champagne-soaked suit he'd worn for a 1983 clinching party.

Did I mention Opening Day? Frank was not the manager. Cal Ripken Sr. was the man with the lineup card, although he'd last just six games, getting one of the quickest pink slips in history.

The Brewers had beaten the Orioles 12-0 in front of a record crowd of 52,395 at Memorial Stadium. That day, the O's revealed plenty about themselves by letting a runner score from second on an infield hit, allowing a steal of home and watching four pitchers allow 16 hits, throw two wild pitches, walk five and hit two.

"The positive thing is that we're going to show up Wednesday and the score will be 0-0," Ripken Sr. said.

True enough. On Wednesday, the Orioles took a 1-0 lead into the sixth inning, but lost 3-1. That was the first of a series of excruciating losses in those opening weeks—3-0, 4-3, 3-2, 1-0 (in 11 innings), 4-3. You get the picture. There was also 12-1, 13-1, 9-3.

Here's what makes no sense. The 1988 Orioles believed they could contend. They had a pair of future Hall of Famers in Eddie Murray and Cal Ripken. Lynn was one of the best outfielders of his generation.

Mike Boddicker and Scott McGregor had been rotation mainstays who helped the O's win the World Series five years earlier. And they were just lousy.

But there were touching moments, too. One of those happened on May 2nd when the Orioles—1-23 at the time—were welcomed back to Memorial Stadium by a sellout crowd of 50,402.

To understand this phenomenon, you have to understand Baltimore. It has never been like other major league cities. It has always had a small town style and attitude.

Those O's, as bad as they were, were our O's. In a pre-game ceremony that night, Maryland Governor William Donald Schaefer and O's owner Edward Bennett Williams announced an agreement to fund what would become Oriole Park at Camden Yards, the retro-modern ballpark that began a wave of traditional ballparks with modern amenities. If Camden Yards was the Orioles contribution to baseball in 1988, then it was a wildly successful season.

Williams would lose a 10-year battle against cancer later the season, and so this would be the final time he would see his O's play in person. I waited in a hallway when he began to make his way out of the park. I wanted to say thanks.

I'm pretty sure I would have gotten hired by the Washington Post whether he'd liked me or not. But his recommendation of me to his buddy, Ben Bradlee, the legendary editor, did not hurt.

We shook hands, chatted briefly, and that was that. A few days later, his team president, Larry Lucchino, showed up at his home to show him a redesigned hat the Orioles were thinking of wearing in 1989.

"Rome is burning, and you're showing me a hat?" Williams asked, probably only half-serious.

By then, he knew he would not be around for another Opening Day. He would have loved the 1989 Orioles. Losing 107 times in 1988 forced the franchise to do an organizational reboot, and by Opening Day 1989 they were much younger and much more entertaining.

When the 1989 schedule was released with the O's opening against the Red Sox, Dan Shaughnessy of the Boston Globe wrote: "Guaranteed no-hitter for Roger Clemens."

The Orioles rallied to win 5-4 in 11 innings that day and were off and running on an 87-75 season in which they very nearly went from worst to first. That season was so much fun and offered so much hope for the future that some of the sting of 1988 was eased.

But it will always live in the hearts and minds of plenty of people. Just ask Terry Kennedy.

Frank Isola, *The Athletic*

My first ever beat was the **1993 Mets**. I was young, inexperienced and basically had no idea what I was getting myself into. Luckily I had Joe Sexton from The New York Times, the best combination of writer and reporter I've ever been around, to lean on. He had a feeling the Mets would struggle, but I'm not sure he had them losing 103 games. A complete train wreck.

That spring Bob Klapisch and John Harper's book, "The Worst Team Money Could Buy," about the 1992 team was released. In early April, Bobby Bonilla confronted Klapisch and threatened him with "I'll show you the Bronx." That was the same season when Bret Saberhagen shot bleach from a Super Soaker at reporters. Vince Coleman accidentally injured Dwight Gooden with a golf club while swinging it in the clubhouse. Later in the season, while in a car, Coleman injured three fans when he tossed a firecracker toward a crowd of autograph seekers outside Dodger Stadium. He never played again for the Mets.

They were a bad team with some bad apples. A couple of things stick out. Chico Walker would always talk about a young nephew who he was sure would one day make it in the NBA. That nephew? Antoine Walker. Also, on Labor Day weekend, the Mets called up one of their top prospects, Butch Huskey. In his debut, Huskey faced the late Daryl Kile, who threw a no-hitter. Huskey struck out three times. Chico Walker said that in the second inning Eddie Murray told him, "this guy has no-hit stuff tonight." I also covered the 2005-06 Knicks. Larry Brown was the coach. Stephon Marbury was the point guard. Isiah Thomas the team president. Jim Dolan the owner. Enough said. It was a soap opera. Easiest year I've ever had. The stories wrote themselves. It was a surreal 82 games of which they won 23.

Pedro Gomez, ESPN

The **1995 Oakland A's** have zero reason to be remembered. They began circling the drain from Day 1 — a 13-1 loss at Toronto — and wound up in last place in the American League West. I was a beat writer covering the club for the Sacramento Bee and from the beginning it was a bizarre year. Like every other club in the majors, the A's had two spring trainings; one with replacement players, who owners swore were going to take the field on opening day before they realized their error in judgement, and then the abbreviated spring training with real major leaguers once the labor dispute was resolved. The A's had just gone through a transition of their own, having been sold by the benevolent Levi Strauss heir Walter Haas Jr. to a group headed by Steve Schott, who was once described by a Bay Area columnist as Steve "Hey Is That A Quarter In The Gutter?" Schott.

The A's were just a few seasons removed from being the kings of baseball, averaging more than 97 wins per season from 1988 to 1992 and reaching the postseason four times, the World Series three times and winning a championship in that span. Now the kings of swagger, who once strolled into cities with an attitude that basically said, we're going to take your girlfriends, were the dregs of baseball. It was the nadir in the career of Hall of Fame manager Tony La Russa, as strong a managerial presence in the game during the previous decade, now reduced to trying to defend Schott and propping up a roster he knew had little chance of accomplishing anything.

This group was a mix of veterans who were dying on the vine and young players who wound up with no more than a handful of big league games on their resumes. La Russa wanted to be anywhere but here. Veteran starters like Dave Stewart and Ron Darling were released during the season, never to pitch again. Darling's release was especially painful since La Russa called him into his office to give him the bad news on August 19. Unbeknownst to La Russa, it was Darling's 35th birthday. Dennis Eckersley would never pitch for Oakland again.

The players were often ornery, with the always courteous Stewart uncharacteristically curt at times. Todd Stottlemyre, the ace of the staff, got into a shouting match with a radio reporter in the clubhouse one day that escalated to the point where it seriously looked like a punch might be thrown. Mark McGwire would be traded the next season and his heir-apparent, Jason Giambi, was a fun-loving rookie

who didn't know any better. But the A's, at least the way they had become known the previous half-dozen years, were gone for good, replaced by bottom-feeders.

David O'Brien, *The Athletic*

Near the end of 1998 spring training, Florida Marlins manager Jim Leyland sat behind the desk in his office at Space Coast Stadium in Melbourne, Fla., smoking a cigarette and talking shop with a few writers who covered the team. He lowered his gravelly voice and told us he was going to say something that we couldn't use.

"We," he said, "are going to get slaughtered."

We laughed. He did not.

"I'm serious," he said. "This may be the worst pitching staff ever assembled."

That was the unofficial start to the season for the worst baseball team I've covered in 24 years as a major league beat writer. The 54-108 **Marlins of 1998**, otherwise known as the remnants of the '97 World Series champions. Then-owner Wayne Huizenga, planning to sell the team, had ordered general manager Dave Dombrowski to slash a \$53.5 million payroll to less than \$20 million.

Huizenga, the late Florida billionaire, decided by midseason 1997 to sell when attendance didn't climb as he anticipated after an offseason spending spree that brought Moises Alou, Bobby Bonilla, Alex Fernandez and Leyland to a team that had signed pitchers Kevin Brown and Al Leiter a year before, and after giving Gary Sheffield a six-year, \$61 million extension in the first week of the 1997 season.

By the time the Marlins won the '97 NL wild card – on the way to winning the World Series in the franchise's fifth year – several veterans met with Huizenga and urged him not to blow up the roster, to give them a chance to make another run since all key members of the team were signed to multi-year deals. But he had already made up his mind. They won the World Series knowing the team would be broken up.

Edgar Renteria drove in Craig Counsell with the winning run in the 11th inning of World Series Game 7 against Cleveland on Oct. 26, 1997, and by Christmas Dombrowski had already traded Alou, Brown, Robb Nen, Devon White, Jeff Conine, Dennis Cook, Kurt Abbott and others.

Dombrowski wasn't able to trade Sheffield and his big contract that winter after Sheffield's modest 1997 performance, but on May 14 he packaged Sheffield with Bonilla, Jim Eisenreich, Charles Johnson and young pitcher Manny Barrios and sent them to the Dodgers in a deal that brought future Hall of Famer Mike Piazza and Todd Zeile to Florida. It was a brief stop for Piazza, traded eight days later to the Mets.

Renteria, Counsell and World Series MVP Livan Hernandez weren't traded because they were young and inexpensive, as were rookie first baseman Derrek Lee, rookie second baseman Luis Castillo, and outfielders Cliff Floyd and rookie Mark Kotsay. Primary starters at four of eight positions were 23 or younger, and the team opened with a starting rotation of Hernandez, converted reliever Felix Heredia and rookies Brian Meadows, Rafael Medina and Eric Ludwick.

Leyland had nine pitchers make at least six starts, including seven aged 23 or younger. Some were rushed to the majors far sooner than they should've been; some were fringe prospects at best and would barely pitch in the majors again.

Ryan Dempster went on to have a 16-year career including 67 wins and 87 saves during nine seasons with the Cubs. But in 1997 he was a 21-year-old kid rushed to the majors with barely any experience above Single-A and that summer he fought back tears when sent back down after going 1-5 with a 7.08 ERA for the Marlins. Hernandez, the Opening Day starter, went 10-12 with a 4.72 ERA, 104 walks and 37 homers allowed in 234 1/3 innings. He was 23.

The Marlins beat the Cubs on Opening Day, then lost their next 10. They finished 52 games out of first place and won eight or fewer games in four of six full months, twice losing 20 in a month. They were outscored by 256 runs. Floyd (22 home runs), Lee (17) and Kotsay (11) were the only Marlins to hit more than seven homers.

They went 0-9 against the Giants, 0-9 against the Brewers, 2-7 against the Cubs and didn't have a winning record against any NL opponent. They were 22-53 after the All-Star break, getting outscored 445-299. Rookie Jesus Sanchez never pitched above Double-A before his debut with the Marlins in 1998. In his 12th start, he gave up a monster homer to Mark McGwire at old Busch Stadium in St. Louis, an estimated 545-foot drive that was the longest McGwire hit during his record-breaking 70-homer season.

It was during that series that Leyland made a comment about how he felt bad for many of the young, in-over-their-heads pitchers. "They're a great group of guys, the kind you want to take out to dinner – and then release them," Leyland joked.

At least I think he was joking.

Teddy Greenstein, Chicago Tribune

The **2002 Cubs** were a miserable bunch, bad enough to saddle three managers with losing records: Don Baylor (34-49), Rene Lachemann (0-1) and Bruce Kimm (33-45). My coverage reflected that anguish, apparently.

Something I wrote got under the skin of utility man Chris Stynes, who retaliated one day during batting practice at Wrigley Field by lobbing baseballs at my feet from the outfield. INCOMING!

I heard Delino DeShields was ticked at me so I approached him and asked: Are we cool? He stared me down, saying nothing until I slinked away.

The coup de grace came in the season's final week. I heard that Joe Girardi had turned off Sammy Sosa's boom box, an act many viewed as daring and rebellious. Girardi downplayed it, telling me he had a migraine and Sosa wasn't around. I told him I wouldn't make a big deal of it. I made it the lead item in my Cubs notes, expecting it to run on page 5.

Instead, it ran on the Chicago Tribune's sports front – with the headline "LOONEY TUNES AT WRIGLEY FIELD"

I walked into the clubhouse the next morning, and Sosa grabbed my shoulder, saying: “What the fuck was that?!” Even Girardi, my fellow Northwestern buddy, shunned me. I remember approaching Kerry Wood and asking: Do you have a second for Mr. F-cking Popularity? He did.

A pleasant postscript, though: The next time I saw Girardi, he said the incident gave him cred in the industry, as in: You stood up to Sammy. ‘Bout time someone did.

And this was weird: My future wife and I were out in St. Louis after a Cubs game. At the bar, I noticed a familiar face. I looked at her and mouthed: CHRIS STYNES. He approached us. We chit-chatted. He showed us his drivers’ license photo with wild, Sideshow Bob hair. And we never spoke of whatever prompted him to chuck those baseballs at me.

Marly Rivera, ESPN and ESPN Deportes

My years as a New York Yankees beat writer were the hardest of my career. I am using a turn of phrase with “the worst” to signify just how difficult it was. To cover the **Yankees from 2012-16** meant at that time a double-digit traveling beat. It meant competing with some of the best and grittiest baseball writers in the business, and also with the best national writers, many of them with deeply-seated roots and connections in New York. All while being the only bilingual person and only woman (and one of two people of color) alongside them, doing a job I felt frequently ill-equipped to do. I was constantly trying to prove that I could be as good as my then ESPN colleagues Andrew Marchand and Wally Matthews, while still trying to maintain my own identity. I don’t think I ever accomplished it.

The team was full of players who required constant coverage, and who weren’t always the most quotable or most willing to address controversial topics. During that time, the Yankees also missed the playoffs in back-to-back seasons for the first time since 1992-1993, so needless to say it wasn’t a happy time in that clubhouse. It also meant following the twilight of the careers of Yankee icons like Jorge Posada, Mariano Rivera, and Derek Jeter, to name a few. It was also the time Alex Rodriguez was dealt the largest penalty for performance-enhancing drug use in MLB history. The storylines and the appetite for them were endless.

Developing contacts was even harder. I was the newcomer, and not many people had much respect for me or what I could do. A lot of that had to do with being a Latina and trying to go against a stigma, because of many so-called Latina sports “reporters” that make a mockery out of this job. So I had to be twice as good as everyone else. And I couldn’t. There were no other women of color doing my job at the time. I had no one I could relate to or that could relate to me, except my mentor at ESPN, Claire Smith. And at least at ESPN, she made sure I was listened to. But it wasn’t always easy. Brian Cashman’s was the first of only a few phone numbers I had in the organization.

I didn’t get any respect until I started breaking news. The Latin players felt a lot more comfortable talking to me in Spanish, hence, I would find out things before anyone else. Whether it was about an injury, a player who was about to be traded or released, they would tell me about it. And many times they would tell me not to say anything. I became their confidant and eventually was allowed to release information to the public.

My life became covering the Yankees, and it really colored everything I did every single day. There was no offseason. I always told my colleagues on the beat, “Players may read you... but their families read

me.” I, of course, was referring to the Spanish-speaking players and their families. I cannot count the amount of emails or messages (this was the time of a growth in popularity for Twitter and Instagram) that I would get from players’ family members criticizing a story I wrote or giving me pointers on how to do my job. They were not always kind.

Those years, which I still consider “the worst,” did make me a smarter, stronger and more resourceful reporter ... even if I did not appreciate it at the time. I am a better reporter for having done that job, but at that time I felt worthless and lost. I especially felt that I was letting not only myself down, but also any woman of color who could look up to me to one day do that job.

The Yankees beat has changed greatly, and very few newspapers and digital outlets truly cover it as a classic “beat” anymore. There are two other women of color whose job is to write about baseball as a beat, Maria Guardado, who now covers the Los Angeles Angels after a stint covering the New York Mets, and Maria Torres, who covers the Kansas City Royals. So in just a few years, times have changed. At least I hope they have. But every once in a while that fear creeps in that I will never be good enough, and that certainly comes from my years covering the Yankees.

Rustin Dodd, *The Athletic*

In the mid-2000s, the Kansas City Royals franchise lost 100 games three times in four seasons, perfecting the kind of ineptitude that lingers in the hippocampus. An outfielder scaled a wall when the fly ball dropped on the warning track; a player dropped a pop fly because his sunglasses order hadn’t shipped; a first baseman got caught in the tarp and drilled in the back by an errant throw. It was comical stuff. “I never say it can’t get worse,” manager Buddy Bell famously said.

By definition, the **2018 Royals** were in the same category. They lost 104 games, matching the 2004 team for the second-worst record in franchise history. Only the 2006 club (56-106) was worse. And while they were the worst Royals team I have ever covered (my first season was 2009), they were also a good reminder: Not all bad teams are embarrassing; not all have toxic clubhouses or off-field drama or wild moments. Sometimes bad teams are just ... bad.

The 2018 Royals were so bad that they sunk to a franchise-worst 52 games under .500 in August; so bad that they won eight games in June and it was their third worst month; so bad that the team traded all its veteran players with trade value and started going with younger, fringe prospects — and the team suddenly got a lot better.

Yet being around the 2018 Royals for six months also taught me something about losing: There’s something noble about a routine-oriented pro who shows up each day, puts in his work and then takes a beating. There’s something honorable about a relief pitcher (oftentimes Brandon Maurer) who blew another game and then waited around at his locker to answer questions.

The Royals struggled to score runs, they gave up a lot of homers, and the clubhouse was a strange place, a combination of prideful regulars left over from a World Series champion, mercenary veterans on one-year deals, and a cast of young players. The team, frankly, was mostly outgunned. But manager Ned Yost and veterans such as Alex Gordon and Salvador Perez seemed hell-bent on conveying a message: We may lose ... but that doesn’t mean you don’t prepare like a winner.

Don't take a day in the show for granted.

One summer night on the road, after another professional loss, the crew of beat reporters trudged into Yost's office. Running out of questions, we started out with a generic question about the night's starter. He hadn't been good, and it was not an interesting question, and it sent Yost into a bad mood, the tension persisting for the rest of the postgame session. He said little.

When the cameras had left the room, and the reporters started to exit, Yost stood up: "Guys," he said, his tone changing. "Help me ... I'm trying here."

In a season of trying to maintain positivity, of looking at the big picture and the long-term, Yost appeared human for a moment. He just wanted a better question, something to help him steer through another monotonous interview about a losing team.

By September, Yost was in better spirits. The team had improved across the last month. The organization had weathered the storm. It had to be one of the least angry 104-loss seasons in baseball history.

The Royals took their beating and pressed onward, leaning on pride, hard work and occasionally gallows humor.

So, yes, I'll remember the professionalism in the face of disaster. I'll also always remember starting pitcher Jason Hammel, standing near his locker after a victory over Detroit on April 20. The Royals had started 3-14, they'd lost a ton in a row, and it took more than three weeks to notch victory No. 4.

"Yeah," Hammel said, "we were stuck on three for a while."

They lost again the next night.

FROM MLB.COM

Each team's greatest postseason moment

By Will Leitch

There are just four teams remaining in this year's postseason, but every fan, even those of the Mariners (the team with the longest postseason drought, now up to 17 seasons), can relate to what it feels like to be in the playoffs. The late nights, the constant tension, the stakes so high you can barely breathe ... and when something wonderful happens, the release and the pure, unbridled jubilation.

With that in mind, we take a look at the greatest postseason moments of the division era. Even if your team isn't a postseason team, you can remember your great October moments ... and if it is, you can dream of maybe having another one this month that's even better.

(For the purpose of this exercise, we are going back to 1969, which is the start of divisional play and the birth of the postseason as we know it.)

AL WEST

Angels: Scott Spiezio's game-tying homer, Game 6, 2002 World Series, Oct. 26, 2002

The **most Rally Monkey of all the Rally Monkey moments**. **Runner-up:** Troy Percival gets last out to win 2002 World Series, Oct. 27, 2002.

Astros: Charlie Morton finishes the Dodgers off, 2017 World Series, Nov. 1, 2017

This was so long ago you might not remember it, but trust me, it was wonderful. **Runner-up:** Chris Burke sends everybody home after 18 innings, 2005 NLDS.

Athletics: Eck closes out the 1989 World Series, October 28, 1989

When in doubt, go with the Hall of Famer **closing out a series** for an all-time great team. **Runner-up:** Joe Rudi's amazing catch, World Series Game 2, Oct. 14, 1973.

Mariners: Ken Griffey Jr. slides home to win the 1995 ALDS, Oct. 8, 1995

Basically, everything wonderful about the history of Mariners baseball, happening in one play. **Runner-up:** Mariners win most recent postseason series, 2001 ALDS over Cleveland.

Rangers: Neftali Feliz sends Texas to its first World Series, 2010 ALCS, Oct. 22, 2010

Over the hated Yankees, no less. **Runner-up:** Josh Hamilton's 2011 World Series Game 6 homer, which was *this* close to being one of the greatest baseball moments of recent memory.

**Article cut to only include AL West-related material.*