



## ***Cubs, Sox were pace-setters in 2008 and other seasons***

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
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In the iPhone, internet-gobbling-everything-in-its-path attention-deficit world, we hardly remember what happened an hour ago, let alone eight years distant.

So when we're all amazed over the Cubs and White Sox's best-in-baseball starts, we think it's unprecedented. And we are wrong.

Even the most phone-mesmerized Millennials who paid any attention of baseball should be able to conjure up memories of the 2008 season, if they cleared their minds of clutter for a minute. Both the Cubs and White Sox won their respective divisions and made the playoffs together for the first time since 1906.

The Cubs were a romping, stomping powerhouse under Lou Piniella for almost the entire regular season, clinching the NL Central with a week to go over the hated Cardinals at Wrigley Field. On Aug. 29, the Cubs were 85-50, their post-World War II high-water mark above .500 (including the surprise 2015 team). The great effect of this surge, of course, was negated by their jittery three-game sweep by the Dodgers in the NLDS that quickly ended that team's championship window.

At the same time, the Sox were famed for their "Blackout Game" in which John Danks beat the Twins 1-0 on Sept. 30 to win the NL Central in contest No. 163. But not as easily remembered was the Ozzie Guillen-led team holding onto first for the majority of games from mid-May through mid-September. Only a startling five-game losing streak near the end of the season put the Sox in the jam in which they captured three must-win games in a row to make the postseason. The bloom was off the rose when the Sox won just one of four ALDS games against Joe Maddon's Rays.



**Lou Piniella (left) and Ozzie Guillen in 2008. Both managers featured plenty of accomplishments in the regular season. Piniella photo credit Jauerback. Guillen photo credit [Keith Allison](#).**

The purists among players insist there is one World Series championship, and everyone else finishes second. Still, some credit has to be given to exciting regular seasons. That's the reason we love baseball so much and keep coming back for more in Chicago despite often-underachieving franchises.

I'm an old-timer by classical standards. So for the Millennials, I'll give a quick primer about 1977.

The first year of Jimmy Carter's presidency offered up surprise contenders on both sides of town. The Cubs used total team production and closer Bruce Sutter's then-unique split-finger fastball to zoom to a 47-22 record, eight games in front, by the end of June. Meanwhile, Bill Veeck's rent-a-player philosophy was the basis of the "South Side Hit Men," a homer-happy, defensively-poor team (just hear then-starter Steve Stone's rants) that thrilled the blue-collar fans in old Comiskey Park.

Reality eventually set in during the second half. The Cubs held first place as late as Aug. 6 and the Sox as late as Aug. 19. The fans had a rollicking time and a winning spirit permeated the city even when both teams experienced the usual denouement. I'll never forget the fans giving the Cubs a standing ovation every time they took the field in the first inning – even in the season's final home game when a massive collapse was nearly complete.

### **Ed Sullivan thought he'd be Chicago-bound**

Go back 10 more years, to 1967. Ed Sullivan suggested he'd bring his mega-popular Sunday-night CBS-TV variety show to Chicago if the Cubs and Sox played in the World Series. In mid-July, such a vision was not outlandish.

The Cubs totally transformed the franchise from its mid-century joke to a contender and summertime attraction. A 103-loss sad sack outfit in 1966, the exciting team under Leo Durocher twice claimed a share of first in July. After the July 2 win over the Reds at Wrigley Field, many in the crowd of 40,000 in Wrigley Field refused to leave until the groundskeepers ran up the Cubs flag to the top of the yardarm above the scoreboard.

At the same time, riding team pitching stinginess better than that of the Koufax-Drysdale Dodgers of previous seasons, the Sox had a piece of the American League lead as late as Aug. 24. They stayed close 'till an ill-timed doubleheader sweep in Kansas City (by the A's before their move to Oakland) in late September. The only disappointment was somewhat modest crowds that kept South Side attendance under 1 million. There were mitigating factors, though, in the socially-charged tenor of the times.

A forgotten entry is the 1973 season. The Cubs and Sox both started fast, with a combined total of 55 victories by the end of May. Unfortunately, collective age on the North Side along with a season-ending injury to Dick Allen and a starting pitching shortage with the Sox prompted quick reversals. Each team limped home with just 77 victories.

Despite optimistic projections, nothing is assured for the postseason for either team this year. But the lesson is to enjoy the ride while it is in operation. That's why we have such fond memories of the above seasons. Those memories last a lifetime like nothing else in any other sport.