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## Baseball memories: Pack-by-pack replay

By Joe Soehn / Special to MLB.com

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Did you ever wish you could go back in time?

While this question may prompt fans of the movie "Napoleon Dynamite" to recall Uncle Rico -- who wistfully spoke these words while wishing he could go back to 1982 to "take state" -- it may cause many of us to really ponder what it would be like to revisit another time and place.

Well, for all you baseball fans and aspiring time travelers, today is your lucky day.

Through the magic of baseball cards -- particularly ones stored in a box of 2004 Upper Deck Legends Baseball that's been sitting unopened in my home for some time now -- epic baseball moments from the past are about to come alive.

I've got to tell you, I'm excited to be your host for this fantastic voyage; I guess you could say I kind of feel like Mr. Roarke from Fantasy Island. This seems fitting, because this box of cards focuses on "Timeless Teams," primarily from the 1970s and '80s -- the heydays of Mr. Roarke and Tattoo.

The text on the box tells me we've got 18 packs to fuel our visit to yesteryear, so let's get started and see where this time machine takes us:

**Pack 1:** There he is -- Joe Morgan of Cincinnati (card No. 131) -- wearing a grin that offers a telltale sign of his love of the game. Remember when he used to flap his arm to maintain a proper stance in the batter's box? Who didn't try to mimic that as a kid?

**Pack 2:** After opening this pack, we're fast-forwarding ahead to 1992. I find a card of Dave Winfield (No. 294) pictured with the Toronto Blue Jays. In Game 6 of the World Series (the first Series to be played outside of the U.S.), Winfield produced a Series-winning double vs. Atlanta that earned him his first championship, at the age of 41. Winfield was one of my favorite players -- his quick, powerful swing was pure dynamite.

**Pack 3:** I can still hear Vin Scully, the legendary Dodgers broadcaster and storyteller, who many times recounted how Steve Yeager -- who's present in this pack (No. 176) -- invented a throat-protecting device attached at the bottom of a catcher's mask. The cousin of famed pilot Chuck Yeager came up with the invention after he was struck in the neck by a piece of a broken bat while he was standing in the on-deck circle during a game in 1976. My greatest memories of Yeager, however, came with his MVP performance for my favorite team as a kid, the Dodgers, in the 1981 World Series.

**Pack 4:** Hey, check out FOX Sports baseball analyst Tim McCarver during his playing days with the St. Louis Cardinals (No. 4). Today he's an expert with in-game commentary, but many people may not realize that he was once an expert catcher. He caught for a top-notch pitching staff, including 1964 World Series MVP Bob Gibson, and he led the Cards with 11 hits in that Fall Classic victory over the New York Yankees.

**Pack 5:** Is that Phil Niekro showing us a grip for a knuckleball (No. 239)? "Knucksy" really knew how to baffle hitters with that pitch.

**Pack 6:** This pack brings reminders of the time when my sister presented me with my first big baseball autograph -- Lou Brock's -- after she happened to see him at a public appearance he was making. Brock (No. 36) was a sensational ballplayer who could really burn up the base paths, and I was always proud to tell others I had his autograph.

**Pack 7:** OK, I'll admit it, I'm hoping an autographed card pops up soon. No signatures yet, though. Steve Sax and Ron Cey, two more favorite Dodgers of mine, are in this pack, however.

**Pack 8:** This pack brought back memories of 1987, when I was beginning my sophomore year in college. The story in baseball that fell was the Minnesota Twins. I'll admit, I hopped along for the ride on their winning wagon and would have waved a "Homer Hanky" had I been at any of their home games at the Metrodome. The club, led by the late Kirby Puckett (No. 274), was definitely a fun team to watch.

**Pack 9:** "Calling Dr. K. Calling Dr. K." What an amazing pitcher Dwight "Doc" Gooden (No. 256) was during his MLB career. I really got into checking out strikeout stats for pitchers after he put up those phenomenal numbers in 1984 (276 Ks) and 1985 (268 Ks) for the New York Mets.

**Pack 10:** Don Mattingly's farewell to baseball is remembered after the opening of this pack. The card (No. 297) features a classic pose of "Donnie Baseball," and though the Yankees lost in his only playoff campaign, Mattingly went out with a bang, hitting .417 with one home run and six RBIs vs. Seattle in their 1995 AL Division Series matchup.

**Pack 11:** Here's my grand-slam pack. First, there's a card of Nolan Ryan with the California Angels (No. 165), and quicker than one of his fastballs, I'm instantly reminded of the first MLB game I ever attended. On July 13, 1979, I watched in person at the "Big A" as Ryan tossed a one-hit 6-1 win over the Yankees. Next, I see an autographed card of Mookie Wilson, who hit the infamous grounder to Bill Buckner that led to the Mets scoring the winning run of Game 6 of the 1986 World Series. I was impartial to both the Mets and Red Sox going in to that series, but I tell you, I found myself rooting for a Mets comeback that night (sorry Boston fans), and Game 6 remains one of my all-time favorites. Twenty years later, that "Amazin'" moment is brought home to me again, thanks to this card.

**Pack 12:** Autograph No. 2 comes my way with a signed card of Dodgers great Bill Russell. An anchor in that vaunted infield of Steve Garvey, Davey Lopes, Russell and Cey, the native of Pittsburgh, Kan., was Mr. Reliable for the Blue Crew for 18 seasons.

**Pack 13:** What is it with the No. 13? Get this: I have a card of Wilson (No. 261) that was inserted right next to -- you guessed it -- Buckner (No. 93). But if this pack had theme music, it would be Sister Sledge's "We Are Family" because the 1979 Pittsburgh Pirates' family is represented by Dave Parker (No. 173). Hey, let's twist the foil inside out and create a disco ball effect!

**Pack 14:** In 1982, the Milwaukee Brewers won the American League pennant and were led by league MVP Robin Yount (No. 111). Although St. Louis defeated Yount's Brewers in the World Series, the talented shortstop batted .414 in a thrilling seven-game showdown.

**Pack 15:** The two great pitchers in this pack -- Steve "Lefty" Carlton (No. 197) and Ed Figueroa (No. 147) -- remind me of a time when starters regularly finished games on their own. Carlton totaled double-digits in complete games in all but one of his 24 Major League seasons. Meanwhile, Figueroa completed 63 games in full during his career, a total that would rank in the top five among today's active leaders.

**Pack 16:** Through this pack, I get to witness: Tom Seaver throwing heat for the Cincinnati Reds (No. 170), Brian Doyle fielding a ground ball for the Yankees (No. 185), Jim Palmer looking dapper in his early days with Baltimore (No. 12), Dusty Baker showing power at the plate for the Dodgers (No. 140) and Sparky Lyle unwinding a pitch for the Yanks (No. 161). How about that?

**Pack 17:** Although former Boston slugger George "Boomer" Scott (No. 15) appears in this pack, the good times wouldn't have lasted long had a Red Sox fan unwrapped the foil on this one. On card No. 154, the one-game playoff between the Yanks and BoSox, played on Oct. 2, 1978, comes rushing back. It's Bucky Dent's homer over the Green Monster at Fenway all over again.

**Pack 18:** My tour through time concludes with recollections of Jim Rice (No. 110) and Tommy John (No. 144), two baseball heroes who were favorites of mine when it came down to selecting an All-Star team to go up against my cousin George's hand-picked bunch. In the regular batter vs. pitcher game we played as kids, I enjoyed emulating these two players and doing my own public address intros before each at-bat. As Jimmy Rice, I think I hit a few moonshots on the neighbors' rooftop. Or was that the Green Monster?

What, no more time-traveling fuel? Alas, my empty box tells me the ride to baseball's past is now over.

For now, anyway.

Because, as you can see, traveling through the national pastime's history isn't that difficult. There's no need to go through any weightless-in-space training or construct some complicated contraption to get away from the present for a while.

No, visits to bygone eras are as easy as a trip to your attic, garage, basement or local baseball card shop.

*Joe Soehn is an online content developer for The Upper Deck Company and part-time freelance writer living in Carlsbad, Calif. This story was not subject to the approval of Major League Baseball or its clubs.*

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Tim McCarver caught for a top-notch Cardinals pitching staff during the 1960s. (Louis Requena/AP)

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