

Tigers Stripes

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Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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2012'S KING TIGER: YOU GET THREE GUESSES – By Mark Pattison

Three guesses, and the first two don't count.

It's what happens when you have a roster that's two-deep in American League Most Valuable Player award winners. Justin Verlander, AL MVP in 2011, won King Tiger, as he had in 2009, both odd-numbered years. The new champion, Miguel Cabrera, is this year's King Tiger, just as he had been in 2010 and 2008, all even-numbered years. (Do I sense a Harry Heilmann homage here? Heilmann won the AL batting crown in 1921, '23, '25 and '27.)

In the words of a woman from the Detroit suburbs who cast her vote for Cabrera, "Who else would it be?" It was a sentiment echoed by a clear majority of Society members. Center fielder Austin Jackson finished second, and there was a third-place tie for the aforementioned Verlander, starter Max Scherzer and departed third baseman Brandon Inge.

Cabrera's offensive production speaks for itself -- and those numbers appear elsewhere in this issue of *Stripes*. But, since the Mayo Smith Society asks its members to take into account both on-the-field and off-the-field performance, there are some issues that must be addressed. First, Cabrera stayed sober. During his tenure with the Tigers, he has had two unfortunate incidents of drunkenness; in 2012 (like in 2010 and 2011), alcohol did not get a chance to interfere with his production. Second, Cabrera lost an estimated 25 pounds to get into -- and stay in -- game shape all season long.

Further, he willingly and gladly returned to the more difficult defensive position of third base to make room for free-agent acquisition Prince Fielder (who could benefit from shedding 25 pounds himself). Society members on the annual Spring Training Trip last March recall the bad-hop grounder Cabrera took in his face during a game in Clearwater, Fla., against the Phillies. The ball broke a few orbital bones around Cabrera's right eye, but the eye itself was protected because Cabrera was wearing sunglasses -- thanks to a tip given by teammate Ramon Santiago. We recall reading about the time Al Kaline broke his cheekbone on a fielding play and was forced to sit out five games before he grumped to manager Jimmy Dykes, "I don't play with my cheek" -- and was promptly restored to the lineup. This was similar. Cabrera was back in action before the Smithers' trip ended. And what a season it was for Miggy.

Here are some accolades for Cabrera from Society voters -- the first of which came just nine minutes after the polls opened: "Who else could it be? Miguel Cabrera! He was the first player to win a triple crown since 1967 -- need I say more?"--Maxwell Kates; "No surprise, I'm voting for Miggy as King Tiger. My only regret is how Miggy's (and the Tigers) season ended."--Nick Edson; "It's not even close! Way to go Miguel, a 'perfect season.'"--Ed Jackson; "My vote is for Miggy! Cabrera was a constant, for the entire season. We Tiger fans are so lucky to have him with us."--Dean A. Ross; "If a player wins the MVP and the Triple Crown, he definitely deserves another crown. King Tiger--Miguel Cabrera, no question. Of course, honorable mention has to go to Verlander, Fielder and Scherzer. They certainly helped him get there. What a fun year. Thanks, guys. Let's do it again -- but let's win four more games in 2013."--Deana Carr; "Not too surprising, eh?"--Art Schwartz

But let's hear the huzzahs for the runners-up. Austin Jackson: "Key to the offense and the biggest differential over 2011."--Todd Allen; Justin Verlander: "As much as I'd like to vote for Delmon Young as our best clutch hitter, especially in the last two postseasons, I feel that his after-game offenses in New York eliminate him. So, I'll go again with the Tiger MVP: Justin Verlander."--Carl Shinkle; Max Scherzer: "I vote for Max Scherzer. I recognize this is the non-obvious view, but my rationale is: In the August-September time frame when JV was struggling a bit and the hopes for the division were in the balance Max was our most consistent pitcher and, although he wasn't always at the top, he clearly stepped up and helped right the ship. By

doing so I think that inspired JV, [Doug] Fister, [Anibal] Sanchez and the other pitchers to ‘do their stuff’ which made all the difference. True, he wasn’t in there every day, but not unlike Verlander’s MVP in 2011, the influence of a starting pitcher can definitely extend beyond the days he pitches. Go Tigers in 2013!”--Dan Wright; Brandon Inge: “Based on my understanding of the criteria you outlined for the King Tiger award, my choice for this year would be Brandon Inge. His spirit, effort, sense of teamwork and willingness to do whatever necessary to help the ball club was virtually unmatched. His desire to remain a Tiger, in whatever capacity requested, made him a positive role model for his teammates and a favorite of the fans. He consistently set a wonderful example for all of the younger players and rookies on the team. His commitment to the metropolitan Detroit area and Michigan in general was evidenced in both his willingness to live in the local area year-around and focus his charitable and community service efforts locally. In the event that Brandon was traded away to the A’s disqualifies him from consideration, my current player choice for King Tiger would be Justin Verlander. His spirit, sense of team, and what he means to the Tigers, coupled with the many charitable things he does for the Detroit community as well as local servicemen and women make him a clear choice for me.”--Mike Fenchel.

THE GREAT AL MVP RACE OF 2012 -- By David Raglin

While Miguel Cabrera was clearly King Tiger, the American League Most Valuable Player race was much more controversial. Most of the statistical analysts supported the Angels’ Mike Trout, while the more traditionalists, looking at the remarkable Triple Crown achievement, were for our Miguel Cabrera. Buster Olney of ESPN noted that front-office people who talked to him were almost unanimous for Trout, while players were equally as strong behind Cabrera.

I was very disappointed how heated the arguments on both sides became. The discussion became rather mean at times and were not constructive. Both players are great players and their notable achievements should be celebrated, not degraded or diminished. I am a stat person and a big Tiger fan, so I can see both sides.

What I find very interesting is that while Cabrera did get the Triple Crown this year, it arguably was his worst season at the plate this decade. (Think about that for a minute; that says a lot about Cabrera’s greatness.) While the Triple Crown statistics are important, if you’ve been reading *Tigers Stripes* for a while, you know we look at a variety of statistics to judge a player.

Miguel Cabrera, 2010-2012 at the Plate (League-Leading Figures in Bold)

Year	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	IBB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	SB	CS	GDP	HBP	SF	Outs	RC	RC/G
2010	150	548	111	180	45	1	38	126	89	32	95	.328	.420	.622	1.042	3	3	17	3	8	396	141	9.5
2011	161	572	111	197	48	0	30	105	108	22	89	.344	.448	.586	1.033	2	1	24	3	5	405	149	9.9
2012	161	622	109	205	40	0	44	139	66	17	98	.330	.393	.606	.999	4	1	28	3	6	452	139	8.2

Cabrera actually created more runs in 2010 and 2011 than in 2012, while making many fewer outs, which lead to a much better runs created per game (which is actually runs created per 27 outs) in 2010 and 2011 than in 2012. How did that happen? He got on base much less often in 2012 (a .448 on-base percentage versus .393 in 2012), largely because he walked much less often. Yes, part of that might have been Prince Fielder hitting behind him, making pitchers reluctant to pitch around him, but remember in 2011 he had the equally strong Victor Martinez hitting behind him. He had 50 more at bats in 2012 than in 2011 but had only eight more hits. He had 14 more home runs in 2012, but also had eight fewer doubles.

Let’s now turn to Cabrera and Trout. Below are the same stats for them that we had for Cabrera from 2010 to 2012:

Miguel Cabrera and Mike Trout, 2012 at the Plate (League-Leading Figures in Bold)

Year	Tm	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	IBB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	SB	CS	GDP	HBP	SF	Outs	RC	RC/G
Cabrera	DET	161	622	109	205	40	0	44	139	66	17	98	.330	.393	.606	.999	4	1	28	3	6	452	139	8.2
Trout	LAA	139	559	129	182	27	8	30	83	67	4	139	.326	.399	.564	.963	49	5	7	6	7	396	138	9.4

Cabrera hit more home runs and drove in many more runs than Trout. Their batting averages and on-base percentages were almost the same, but Cabrera had a better slugging percentage. Trout stole a lot more bases while rarely getting caught, and Cabrera hit into many more double plays. The result is the runs created estimates that they created essentially the same number of runs but Trout, who did not come up until late April, made many fewer outs (about the same number of outs Cabrera made in 2010 and 2011, ironically). That is why Trout's 9.4 runs created per game mark is much better than Cabrera's 8.2.

Runs created does not take into account runs batted in (which Cabrera led the league in) or runs scored (in which Trout led the league), because it considered them statistics that are heavily team- and situation-dependent, so it does not give Cabrera credit for his monster RBI total. On the other hand, Trout was a leadoff hitter while Cabrera hit third behind players like Austin Jackson. How did that affect their RBI totals? Even considering the number of men on base, Cabrera was the better RBI man. Cabrera came up to the plate with 387 men on base and drove in 95 of them, a 24.5 percent rate, while Trout came up with 252 men on base and knocked in 53 of them, 21.0 percent. (Note that we confirmed that they had a similar proportion of runners on first, second, and third to knock in.)

On the other hand, Trout was a much better baserunner than Cabrera, in ways that don't show up in runs created (beyond stolen bases, which are a part of runs created). Cabrera was on first base 46 times when there was a single and he advanced to third 14 times. Trout came up 46 times in that situation and got to third 28 times. Going from second to home on a single, Cabrera was 14-for-23 and Trout was 20-for-29. When they were on first when a double was hit, Cabrera scored 6 of 8 times, while Trout scored a similar 7 out of 10 times. Cabrera was thrown out on the bases eight times, while Trout was thrown out on the bases nine times.

For defense, there are two main systems that estimate the number of runs a fielder saves or allows compared to an average player at the position. They have Cabrera at -4 runs (Defensive Runs Saved) and -10 (Ultimate Zone Rating), and Trout is +21 runs (DRS) and +11 runs (UZR). The differences in the two rating systems suggest that the methods for estimating defense are still not as refined as those for offense, but both systems agree that Trout is a much better defensive player.

Both Cabrera's Tigers and Trout's Angels were in pennant races this season. On the morning of August 1, the Tigers were in second place, two and a half games back, while the Angels were also in second place, three games back. The rest of the year, when both teams knew that the games were key in determining who went to the playoffs, Cabrera went on a tear, hitting .344, with a .411 on-base percentage and a monster .670-slugging percentage, while Trout was a respectable .287/.383/.500.

(Some people have suggested that the late-season difference should not matter, noting the Angels finished with a better record than the Tigers and the games at the end of the season count in the standings as much as the games early in the season. I have to respectfully disagree. First, the number of wins did not matter; it was the fact that both teams were fighting for a playoff spot. I also think that the late season games, when a team is in a pennant race, should get extra credit. I liken it to the statistic Win Probability Added, which takes into account game situations to determine the value of the result of a plate appearance. A first-inning plate appearance, in almost every situation, does not mean as much to victory or defeat as a close late-game situation where the game is on the line, and one at-bat can mean victory or defeat. Winning those late-season games, given that it is a close race, is critical and can mean more than the early season games where we do not even know if a team will be in a pennant race.)

The intangibles (defined as contributions not measured by statistics) are on Cabrera's side too. First, when Martinez got hurt, he volunteered to move to third base to make room for Fielder and he worked extra hard to lose a lot of weight and make himself into a reasonable third baseman, something most critics said could not happen. Also, through no fault of his own, Trout was in the minors for the first month of the season, while Cabrera missed only one game all year.

So let's add it up. They created about the same number of runs. Trout made fewer outs in creating those runs. Cabrera was better at driving in runners, even taking into account the differences in the number of runners they had to knock in. Trout was a better baserunner and a much better fielder. Cabrera hit better in the stretch run when both teams were in the pennant race. Cabrera had the better intangibles. It's is close, much closer than either side in the debate this fall made it out to be, but for me I have to pick Trout for MVP because of the better

overall offense, baserunning, and fielding, despite Cabrera's other advantages, but I can see it either way. When it comes down to it, both were great players who both had MVP-level seasons, and it is not insulting either player to call him #2 in this race. However, if I have to choose one player for 2013, ignoring salaries (since it is not my money!) and only considering the 2013 season, I'd much rather have Cabrera. Yes, Trout was great -- for one season. As we noted, Cabrera is this good every year. There is an incredible amount of value in that. There may be no more dependable player in baseball than Miguel Cabrera. We are lucky to have him on the Detroit Tigers.

Note that we had promised an analysis of the Cy Young race in this issue. We ran out of room, so we decided to save that for the February *Tigers Stripes*. It will give you something to look forward to!

THE SPIRIT OF '84 – By Mark Pattison and David Raglin

Since 1999, the work of *Tigers Stripes* has largely been a joint effort by Dave, the *Stripes* sabermetrician since 1984, and Mark, who contributed on occasion in the 1990s until becoming *Stripes* editor in 1999. Their collaboration has extended beyond the newsletter to the playoff-friendly E-Mayo Flash and some Tigers books: "Detroit Tigers Lists and More: Runs, Hits and Eras" in 2002, and the first book they edited for the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), in 2008, "Sock It to 'Em Tigers: The Incredible Story of the 1968 Detroit Tigers."

Now, Mark and Dave's work has extended to a third book, the second they have edited for SABR: "Detroit Tigers 1984: What a Start! What a Finish!" If you have a copy of "Sock It to 'Em Tigers," the new book is in the same vein. There is a biography of every player from the team, plus manager Sparky Anderson and the coaches, all of the broadcasters, the front-office brass, and essays on the team and the city and stadium it has called home.

Mark and Dave were very lucky to have the talents of more than 40 writers, editors, and fact-checkers from SABR and the Mayo Smith Society for this intimate look at each aspect of the Tigers' last World Series championship team. Mark and Dave were not only the project managers, but along with many others, they served as essayists, fact-checkers and proofreaders. Modesty prevents us from saying more than that, but the book is a pleasure to read, even when looking at too-small page proofs for style and typographical errors.

"Detroit Tigers 1984: What a Start! What a Finish!" is published by SABR. At this point, it's not available in bookstores, but it can be ordered online for \$19.95 as a book (252 pages) in a solid 8.5"x11" softcover format, or \$9.95 as an e-reader version. (SABR members can get a book price of \$9.95, or an e-reader price of just \$5.95, if they know the proper discount code.) By the way, neither Mark nor Dave get a dime from sales. The same goes for the other contributors. What with royalties split 40-plus ways, how could you make change for a penny?

To get your copy (or copies!), go to this website: <https://www.createspace.com/4095563>. Remember that Mark and Dave still have copies of their first two books for sale to Society members; look at the bottom of the last page of the newsletter for ordering information.

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For **Detroit Tigers Lists and More** (\$10) or **Sock It to 'Em Tigers** (\$20). autographed by authors David Raglin and Mark Pattison, send to:

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Tigers Stripes, the official newsletter of the Mayo Smith Society, is published nine times a year. **Publisher/Society Administrator:** Todd Miller (412/848-1082, toddprmtg@verizon.net). **Editor:** Mark Pattison (202/829-9289, pattison_mark@hotmail.com). **Writer/ Sabermetrician:** David Raglin (703/556-0332 or 703/835-1198, darags@ymail.com). **Membership Services Coordinator:** Pete Wright. The Mayo Smith Society was established in 1983 by Dale Petroskey, Dennis Petroskey, and Bill Mackay.