

Tigers Stripes

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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KING TIGER WINNER: TIE, GENTLEMEN, PLEASE! -- By Mark Pattison

For the second time since the Mayo Smith Society took over the King Tiger Award for the 2004 season, we have a tie for the honor. It goes to righthanded starter Justin Verlander, which now ties him with Miguel Cabrera for most King Tigers in the award's history, with three. But it also goes to second baseman Ian Kinsler, marking his first such award.

Verlander, who won King Tiger in 2009 and 2011, may have been denied a second American League Cy Young award this postseason, but he was not going to be denied the King Tiger prize, which recognizes a player's on-field and off-field contributions.

Justin led the AL with 254 strikeouts and a 1.00 WHIP (walks plus hits per inning pitched), missed the Cy Young by five points to former teammate Rick Porcello, was second in the league with a 3.04 ERA, second (to another former teammate, David Price) with 34 starts and 227.2 innings pitched, second with a .207 BAA (batting average against), and tied for sixth with 15 wins. He also led the way with 3,667 pitches thrown and was third with 903 batters faced.

Verlander has long been known for his "Verlander's Victory for Veterans," in which he treats dozens of military veterans to a suite at Comerica Park for games he's scheduled to pitch. He's also been a public advocate in the Major League Baseball Players Association.

Kinsler, who completed his third season with the Tigers, put up his best power numbers in a Tigers uniform. He pounded 28 home runs, a personal best since he'd hit 32 for the Texas Rangers in homer-friendly Arlington five years ago. Kinsler's .348 on-base percentage, .484 slugging percentage and .832 OPS his best for Detroit. His Gold Glove at second base and second-place finish for the Fielding Bible award is reflected in a 12 defensive runs saved, tied with Dustin Pedroia for the best among major league second baseman and a league-leading 5.09 range factor at second base.

Here's what the electorate had to say about Kinsler:

"While Miggy had his typical offensive-dominating season, and J.V. becoming a Cy Young candidate in another stellar year, I feel compelled to vote for Ian Kinsler as King Tiger. Ian had a great season all-around. He was consistent and clutch at the plate. When he reached base, there was the expectation of Ian touching the rest of the bases, scoring a Tiger run. How many top-of-the order hitters in MLB can drive in over 80 runs? Ian's defense was stellar, and is overlooked throughout the League. Over the long course of the season, Ian always appeared upbeat, and giving of his time to the media. I truly appreciate Ian Kinsler being a Detroit Tiger." -- Dean A. Ross.

"Kinsler is my man for this year. I hate to think about how they'd have done without that solid, aggressive player at leadoff and 2nd base." -- Rick Vosik.

"I guess we are just used to have Miguel Cabrera and Justin Verlander as our designated King Tiger choices every year, nice problem to have, eh! My choice this year is Ian Kinsler. I have always listened to and used the phrase 'Rub some dirt on it' but I have never seen someone actually do that. And that is how Ian played this season. His toughness and competitiveness has been amazing all year and to top it all off he gets his first Gold Glove! Now that's King Tiger material." -- Ed Jackson.

"My King Tiger is Ian Kindler. In my mind he was the most consistent Tiger on offense and defense all year." -- Carl Shinkle.

"It's so fun to have such a good double-play combo. Ian came through many times with a big hit when we needed it. and if all that wasn't enough, when he stayed in the game with blood dripping down his hand while 'rubbing a little dirt on it' was awesome! He's my Tiger!" -- Deana Carr.

“I’m not one to give Jim Price credit, but his nickname for Kinsler – ‘Everyday Ian’ — heartily wins my endorsement. We haven’t seen this kind of consistency at second base since former King Tiger Placido Polanco, and this kind of power or defense since should-be Hall of Famer Lou Whitaker. He’s been a great clubhouse presence as well. Here’s hoping the Tigers can keep him for a long time to come.” -- Mark Pattison.

Not to be outdone, here’s why Smithers cast their votes for Verlander:

“My vote is for Verlander! I was tempted to split it with Cabrera but think JV had just a slight edge.” -- Bill Bishop.

“Hands down Justin Verlander. I would have liked to see how many wins Justin would have got with any run support. I know he got a lot of no-decisions.” -- Wayne Barry.

“I vote for Justin Verlander as King Tiger 2016. His Cy Young Award-worthy season (16-9, 3.04 with 254 Ks), combined with his continuous involvement in numerous charitable causes in the Detroit area and in his native Virginia, make him most deserving of this honor for the third time in his illustrious career.” -- Todd Miller.

“Back to his old form. Always a chance for something special when he starts!” -- Fred Grant.

“Gotta go with JV this year. He shoulda won the Cy Young again, and he coulda easily if we’d just given him a bit more run support.” -- Paul Dent.

“It means a lot that Verlander has been a Tiger for his whole career (hopefully a Tiger for life) and that he is very involved in charitable activities.” – David Raglin

Not to be ignored, AL Rookie of the Year Michael Fulmer came in third in the balloting, and perennial All-Star Miguel Cabrera finished fourth. Fulmer finished 2016 three innings shy of qualifying for the ERA title. His May-to-July streak of scoreless innings, of starts in which he gave up one earned run or less, or two runs or less, defied logic and kept Detroit in the AL Central title hunt. Fulmer finished tenth in AL Cy Young voting. And Cabrera? Nothing says “aging gracefully” like a .316 batting average, a slash line of .393/.563/.956, 38 home runs, 108 runs batted in, 92 runs scored and a loop-leading 15 intentional walks. It says a lot that Cabrera’s season, as good as it was, received ho-hum support from the Society members.

Verlander and Kinsler will pick up their new hardware at some point during the Society’s annual spring training trip, set for March 18-25 in sunny Lakeland, Fla. The first joint winners? Ivan Rodriguez and Carlos Guillen, if you were wondering. Guillen accepted the award in a pregame ceremony at Joker Marchant Stadium, but I-Rod had the day off that game, so team staff put the prize in his locker.

PUDGE IN THE HALL? -- By David Raglin

The last Baseball Hall of Fame inductee with significant Tiger ties was Sparky Anderson in 2000, and the last player who wore the Tiger uniform for a notable portion of his career was Jim Bunning in 1996 (with Hal Newhouser the only other one in the last 30 years. That could change on January 18 with the Class of 2017 is announced. Ivan “Pudge” Rodriguez, who retired in 2011 after a 21-year career, is on the ballot for the first time. Pudge played for the Tigers for four and two-thirds seasons. Two of his seasons were especially significant -- 2004 and 2006.

Ivan “Pudge” Rodriguez – As a Tiger, For His Career, and Rank Among Catchers

Year	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	SB	CS	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
2004	135	527	72	176	32	2	19	86	7	4	41	91	.334	.383	.510	.893	99	7.1
2005	129	504	71	139	33	5	14	50	7	3	11	93	.276	.290	.444	.735	58	3.9
2006	136	547	74	164	28	4	13	69	8	3	26	86	.300	.332	.437	.769	75	4.9
2007	129	502	50	141	31	3	11	63	2	2	9	96	.281	.294	.420	.714	56	3.9
2008	82	302	33	89	16	3	5	32	6	1	19	52	.295	.338	.417	.756	42	4.9
Detroit	611	2382	300	709	140	17	62	300	30	13	106	418	.298	.328	.449	.777	330	4.9
Career	2543	9592	1354	2844	572	51	311	1332	127	64	513	1474	.296	.334	.464	.798	1398	5.2
C-Rnk	1st	1st	1st	1st	1st	15th	7th	5th	6th	NA	45th	2nd	13th	85th	13th	25th	1st	NA

As we ruefully recall, the Tigers hit rock bottom in 2003, finishing 43-119 and with no players of national significance. The Tigers wanted to become relevant, but who would come to the Tigers? Rodriguez, known as the best catcher in baseball, the 1999 American League Most Valuable Player, and coming off a World Series championship in his only season with the Florida Marlins, was willing to take the chance. It certainly helped that spring was coming soon and the Tigers' offer of four years and \$0 million was significantly more than any other offer; the Tigers had to do that to get players to consider to come to the team.

Pudge was worth that money and more. As you can see, he had a great season in 2004, and he led the Tigers to a 72-90 record. That may not sound like much, but it was 29 games better than the year before, the most wins they had had since 2000, and at one point, they were 60-66.

Rodriguez's second season in Detroit was entirely forgettable. The team did not improve, Rodriguez got into a tiff with manager Alan Trammell when he returned late from Colombia after a four-game suspension, and Trammell was fired at the end of the season.

The 2006 season made up for that. His stats were not great, but he was one of the leaders of the team that won 24 more games than the season before, beat the Yankees in the first round of the playoffs, and swept the A's to get to their first World Series in 22 years. I know that the Tigers lost the Series, but the 2006 team will always have a very special place in my heart, and Pudge was a big part of that.

After that, Rodriguez was on the downside of his career, and after another season and two-thirds in Detroit, he finished his career bouncing around from the Yankees, Astros, back to the Rangers, and the Nationals.

Does Rodriguez belong in the Hall of Fame? His stats say he is a slam dunk. He has more games, at-bats, runs, hits, doubles, and runs created of any catcher in history, but he was, if anything, known more for his defense. Even the modern stats, not around during his career, recognize his defensive prowess. From 1996 to 1999, he was second, first, second, and third in Defensive WAR among all players, not just catchers (despite the fact it is hard for catchers to accumulate a high WAR).

There are two other stars from the 2006 Tigers on the ballot. While neither is close to being a Hall of Famer, each holds a special place in our hearts. Magglio Ordonez arrived in Detroit the year after Pudge under similar circumstances -- looking for a team to give him the contract he was worth. Ordonez's contract even had an out-clause if his serious knee injury prevented him from playing. Ordonez is best known for two things in Detroit. First, of course, is the unforgettable memory we all have; as Dan Dickerson said, "It's way back! The Tigers are going to the World Series". He took the momentum from that home run into the 2007 season, posting one of the best seasons in Tiger history: a .363 average, .434 on-base percentage, a .595 slugging percentage, 152 runs created, and 10.0 runs created per game (so a team of all-Maggs would have scored 10 runs a game!)

Carlos Guillen came to the Tigers in 2004 as did Rodriguez. Acquired in a trade with Seattle, Guillen had about the same WAR that season (4.6) as did Pudge (4.5). He anchored the Tigers infield for several years, having his best season in 2006 for the pennant-winning Tigers, with a 6.0 WAR that was third-best among position players in the American League. Injuries sapped his effectiveness soon after that, but for a few years, he was something special.

One more thought on the Hall; If Pudge makes it this year, he will be the first Tiger on the 2006 pennant-winning team to make it, which will be one more than the 1984 Tigers have (sad but true).

VERLANDER AND THE HALL -- By David Raglin

Speaking of the Hall, there are two current Tigers who are contenders for baseball's greatest honor once they retire. One, Miguel Cabrera, is probably a Hall of Famer now; even if he never had another great season, he would get elected. The other one is Justin Verlander. What are his Hall of Fame credentials and what will they be by the time he retires?

Verlander is only 33 years old, so it's not surprising he still has a way to go, although he is on the Hall of Fame path. His innings pitched, 2,339.0, is only ahead of relievers, pitchers whose career ended early, and special cases (like 19th-century pitchers) among Hall of Famers. However, he still has several seasons left. What will be his stats for the rest of his career?

Justin Verlander's Possible Projected Stats for His Career

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Years	Age	Team	W	L	ERA	G	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	WAR
2005-2016	22-33	DET	173	106	3.47	352	2339.0	2072	981	902	699	2197	50.5
2017	34	DET	16	9	3.04	34	227.7	171	81	77	57	254	6.6
2018	35	DET	13	12	3.46	34	218.3	212	94	84	75	217	4.6
2019	36	DET	11	10	3.46	30	192.0	187	83	74	66	191	4.1
2020	37	DET	11	10	3.46	27	173	168	75	67	59	172	3.7
2021	38	DET	11	12	4.54	26	167.0	181	93	85	53	129	0.9
2022	39	DET	5	8	3.38	20	133.3	113	56	50	32	113	2.2
2023	40	DET	3	7	4.59	15	96.0	104	54	49	31	74	0.5
Career – 19 seasons with DET			243	174	3.52	538	3546.3	3208	1517	1388	1072	3347	73.1

Here is a very, very rough guess of the rest of Verlander's career. It's probably a bit conservative. It projects his future seasons based on his past seasons. (You can look and see which past seasons I used to project his future seasons.) How good is this projection? Well, your guess is as good as mine. I would not believe any of the individual seasons, but the goal of this is to get his career totals.

How good are his career totals? His WAR of 73.1 would be a bit above the average Hall of Famer's 70.0. His innings pitched would be below the average of 3,801, but among the range of many other Hall members. His 243 wins would be surprisingly decent -- close to pitchers like Juan Marichal and Whitey Ford who pitched in eras where starters often pitched complete games. His ERA is very high for a Hall of Fame starter, but he did pitch in a hitter's era and is very close of Tom Glavine's 3.54 (who spent almost all of his career in the National League facing pitchers and not designated hitters).

There are several measures of Verlander's Baseball Reference page that look at his Hall chances (not necessarily should he get in but will he). Bill James has a Black Ink test, basically a look at the number of times and categories where he has led the league (which are shown on his page in black bold type). Verlander does very well there, with two seasons leading in wins, three in innings pitched, and four in strikeouts. He also has a Hall of Fame Monitor which looks favorably on him. On a couple of other standards (the Gray Ink and Hall of Fame Standards tests, he is on the way but not above the general Hall standards yet.) He also has pitched two no-hitters, won a Cy Young, and (rare for a pitcher) an MVP. Those awards matter. I think Alan Trammell would be in there if he had won the 1987 MVP award he earned.

We all know that the Hall is more than ability. After all, it is the Hall of Fame. That has hurt players like Alan Trammell and Lou Whitaker, who were a bit understated. To contrast, Verlander is probably the most famous Tiger pitcher since Mark Fidrych or Denny McLain. He is a national celebrity, engaged to a supermodel, a television spokesman. (Not that Verlander is a self-promoter, but in living his life, he has become famous outside of baseball.) So in his case, the Fame has come first, with the Hall possibly second!

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