

# Tigers Stripes

The Newsletter of the  
**D**  
Mayo Smith Society

Vol. 31, No. 12

Tigers Fans Who Always Care

February 2016

## WHAT'S UP? J-UP! – By David Raglin

Even after the Tigers said they were done, that they were happy with a left/center field combination of Tyler Collins, Anthony Gose, and Cameron Maybin, Tigers fans kept hoping. The team could have used a power-hitting outfielder, and former Tiger Yoenis Cespedes was still out there. It was a natural fit.

So, it was not a shock when word leaked on January 18 that the Tigers had signed a right-handed power-hitting outfielder. The name, though, was a shock. It was not Cespedes. It was Justin Upton. Upton, known as J-Up, signed a six-year \$132.75 million deal, to be paid in even \$22.125 million chunks with a opt-out for Upton after two seasons and \$45.25 million in salary. Let's start with looking at Upton's career:

### Justin Upton Career Statistics

Year	Team	Age	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G	WAR
2007	Arizona	19	43	140	17	31	8	3	2	11	11	37	.221	.283	.364	.647	14	3.4	-0.6
2008	Arizona	20	108	356	52	89	19	6	15	42	54	121	.250	.353	.463	.816	61	5.9	0.8
2009	Arizona	21	138	526	84	158	30	7	26	86	55	137	.300	.366	.532	.899	104	7.2	4.0
2010	Arizona	22	133	495	73	135	27	3	17	69	64	152	.273	.356	.442	.799	76	5.1	1.5
2011	Arizona	23	159	592	105	171	39	5	31	88	59	126	.289	.369	.529	.898	118	7.2	6.1
2012	Arizona	24	150	554	107	155	24	4	17	67	63	121	.280	.355	.430	.785	88	5.6	2.5
2013	Atlanta	25	149	558	94	147	27	2	27	70	75	161	.263	.354	.464	.818	95	6.0	2.9
2014	Atlanta	26	154	566	77	153	34	2	29	102	60	171	.270	.342	.491	.833	97	6.0	3.2
2015	San Diego	27	150	542	85	136	26	3	26	81	68	159	.251	.336	.454	.790	86	5.4	4.4
Total - 9 Seasons.....			1184	4329	694	1175	234	35	190	616	509	1185	.271	.352	.473	.825	739	6.0	24.7

As longtime Mayo Smithers know, RC is runs created, the Bill James estimate of how many runs a player was responsible for creating for his team. RC/G is an estimate of how many runs a game a team would score if the lineup contained nine Justin Uptons. WAR is Wins Above Replacement, an estimate of how many more wins a team would have with that player compared to a replacement player (like Tyler Collins).

Upton has been a very good player for a long time. He was the #1 pick in the 2005 draft by Arizona, the same draft the Tigers took Cameron Maybin with the #10 pick. Upton's brother, Melvin (formerly known as B.J.) was the #2 pick in the 2002 draft. Justin Upton made his major league debut in 2007 at age 19. Upton's best seasons were 2009 and 2011; both years he had over 100 runs created and over 7.0 runs created per game.

After the 2012 season, Upton was traded to the Atlanta Braves for several players after the Diamondbacks had a disappointing season (dropping to 81-81 after winning the division with 94 wins the previous year). Upton's brother had signed with the Braves as a free agent less than a month earlier and Braves fans were giddy over the prospect of two Uptons in the outfield. Although Melvin bombed, Justin had a good year in 2013 as the Braves upset the Washington Nationals to win the National League Eastern Division crown.

The Braves fell to under .500 in 2014 and decided to start the rebuilding process. Upton was traded to the Padres in a blockbuster deal for four prospects. For a few weeks in spring training, he was teammates with Cameron Maybin before Maybin was shipped to Atlanta in the Craig Kimbrel deal. That trade left the Padres with no centerfielder and they did not contend as expected.

We are excited about the Upton signing and we prefer him over Cespedes. Upton is two years younger, and will be 29 and 30 years old in his first two seasons with the Tigers, still in his prime period. If he plays like

we expect him to play, he will opt-out of the contract at that point, which will give the Tigers flexibility. Upton has a small platoon differential, which we will discuss in the next piece, and he is very durable.

It's exciting that the Tigers are the first non-Yankee team, and the third team ever, to have two \$100 million free agent signings in an offseason. However, while we are excited about Jordan Zimmermann and Justin Upton, remember that basically they are replacing David Price and Yoenis Cespedes from the 2015 Opening Day roster. We love Zimm and J-Up, but we'd be hard-pressed to argue that they are better than Price and Cespedes, especially the 2015 version of those players.

The reason the Tigers are a better team now than a year ago is the revamped bullpen and much stronger bench. Signing Upton is a big reason the bench is better and provides the team with needed depth. That has been a sore spot for the Tigers in recent years, but a bench of Cameron Maybin/Anthony Gose, Mike Aviles, Andrew Romine, and Jarrod Saltalamacchia is a very good bench, and Tyler Collins is good insurance to have at AAA.

The Tigers might not be the favorites in the Central with the Royals there, but for years, the Tigers were the overwhelming favorite, until the Royals caught up with them. Maybe now the roles will be reversed.

### **LEFT AND RIGHT** – By David Raglin

The only problem with signing Upton is that he is right-handed is that the Tigers are overloaded with right-handed hitters. On days where Maybin plays center (which should be most of the time), the Tigers might have only one hitter from the left-handed side, switch-hitting Victor Martinez. General Manager Al Avila acknowledged that in Upton's introductory press conference but said, correctly, "In an ideal world, that lefty-right combo -- yeah. But where's that left-handed outfielder out there that's Justin Upton?"

So, how much does it matter? The best way to answer that question is to ask: How do the Tigers hit against right-handers (and left-handers, for that matter)? If they hit OK against righties, that is what matters. As Upton said at the press conference, "If you look at our lineup, I don't think Miguel and Victor have any trouble hitting right handed pitchers." So, let's look at the guys we see as the most likely to be the 13 players who go north with the Tigers and how they do against left-handed and right-handed pitchers.

Before we get into the data in the table, let's have a short discussion on platoon stats and small sample sizes. If you want to determine a player's platoon differential, you can't just look at one season. For example, Upton's split line (batting average/on-base percentage/slugging percentage) in 2015 versus lefties was .191/.258/.300 and .266/.355/.493 against right-handers. Does that mean he is one of the rare righties who hits better against righties? No; in 2014 he was .286/.384/.597 against southpaws and .266/.331/.463 against righties, with similar splits in 2013. Nick Castellanos had a huge platoon differential in 2015 but a very small one in 2014. Therefore, for several players, denoted by asterisks, the data below are for 2013 to 2015 to smooth out the data and/or make up for an unusual 2015 season, while for the rest (players whose 2015 platoon splits were normal for them) the data is from just 2015.

The last column is the difference between the runs created per game against right-handers minus the runs created per game against lefties. A negative number shows they hit better against southpaws and a positive number shows they hit righties better. We would expect right-handed hitters to have negative differences in runs created per game because they hit left-handers better, and that is exactly what we see.

Some of the hitters have extreme platoon differentials. James McCann hit .320 and slugged .557 against lefties, leading to 7.6 runs created per game, while he hit only .247 with low on-base and slugging percentages, which gave him 3.0 runs created per game. Jose Iglesias had a .425 on-base percentage against left-handers and .320 against righties. Nick Castellanos had a mild platoon differential in 2014 but a huge one in 2015, so we used his three-season totals which indicate a significant differential.

On the other hand, one reason the Tigers went after Cameron Maybin was the fact he hit righties about as well as lefties. Ian Kinsler and Miguel Cabrera also had small differentials, hitting both kinds of pitchers very well. Justin Upton also has a small platoon differential, hitting right-handers very well.

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**2016 Tigers Hitters Against Left-Handed and Right-Handed Pitchers, 2015 or 2013-2015**

Pos	Tiger Hitter	Bats	Versus Left-Handed Pitchers					Versus Right-Handed Pitchers					Diff in RC/G
			BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC/G	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC/G	
C	McCann	R	.320	.359	.557	.916	7.6	.247	.277	.332	.609	3.0	-4.6
1B	Cabrera	R	.313	.466	.550	1.016	9.9	.344	.434	.530	.964	9.1	-0.8
2B	Kinsler	R	.305	.348	.450	.798	5.8	.294	.341	.422	.763	5.1	-0.7
SS	Iglesias	R	.354	.425	.465	.889	7.2	.284	.320	.341	.661	3.8	-3.4
3B	Castellanos+	R	.288	.351	.455	.806	5.8	.248	.288	.389	.677	3.7	-2.0
LF	Upton+	R	.250	.365	.494	.859	6.4	.265	.338	.463	.801	5.4	-1.0
CF	Maybin	R	.237	.338	.373	.711	4.4	.276	.323	.370	.692	4.4	-0.0
RF	Martinez, J.D.	R	.265	.377	.538	.915	7.5	.286	.335	.534	.870	6.3	-1.2
DH	Martinez, V.+	S	.321	.372	.511	.883	7.4	.288	.355	.439	.794	5.6	-1.7
C	Saltamacchia+	S	.230	.306	.371	.677	3.9	.248	.331	.437	.769	5.0	1.1
IF	Romine+	S	.300	.328	.367	.695	4.8	.227	.285	.270	.555	2.6	-2.2
IF/OF	Aviles+	R	.243	.286	.346	.632	3.4	.245	.273	.343	.616	3.2	-0.2
OF	Gose	L	.192	.272	.274	.546	2.4	.265	.330	.383	.713	4.2	1.8

+ Data are from 2013-2015 (for the rest of the players, the data are from just 2015)

The most important column is the runs created per game against right-handers, because it helps answer the question: “Can they hit right-handers?” Using the runs created per game figures against right-handers, weighted by an expected number of plate appearances for each player, we can make a rough estimate that the 2016 Tigers against right-handers will score about 5.1 runs per game. That is probably high since injuries, etc., will occur and the replacement players will not do as well. To compare, only one team in the American League scored more than five runs a game in 2015: the Toronto Blue Jays at 5.5; the second-best team scored 4.8 runs per game, the league average was 4.4, and the Tigers scored 4.3. Left-handers beware, this Tigers team is set to score 6.3 runs per game against left-handers. So, while the Tigers are overly right-handed at the plate, they do have enough good hitters that they will do fine against right-handed pitchers. If they make a midseason deal, which history shows they will if they are in the race, we expect they will be looking for a left-handed hitter.

**TIGERS BOOKSHELF: "IN COBB'S SHADOW"** – Review by Mark Pattison

You may be familiar with the political phenomenon of coattails, in which a candidate at the top of the party's ticket is so popular or does so well at the ballot box that other candidates on the party's slate do well, too. That phenomenon worked only in a limited sense for the Tigers' outfield in the club's early days. Ty Cobb was the undisputed star, and he eclipsed not one, not two, but three other Hall of Fame outfielders who played alongside him in Detroit.

That's the thesis behind Dan D'Addona's new book, "In Cobb's Shadow: The Hall of Fame Careers of Sam Crawford, Harry Heilmann and Heinie Manush." Consider the staying power of Cobb's luminosity in the baseball firmament compared to all-time triples leader Crawford, .342 career hitter Heilmann, and Manush, who won his only batting title as a Tiger in between two of Heilmann's four overall crowns. Manush played seven seasons with Detroit (17 overall), six in Cobb's shadow. Heilmann played 15 seasons in Detroit (17 overall), 12 in Cobb's shadow. Crawford likewise played 15 seasons in Detroit (19 overall), the last 13 in Cobb's shadow.

D'Addona's three mini-biographies gives close to half the ink to Crawford, already an established star by the time young Ty arrived in the nascent Motor City in 1905. Wahoo Sam also put in four years with the Pacific Coast League's Los Angeles Angels after his big-league career was over, registering a pair of 239(!)-hit seasons, plus a 199-hit ledger at age 41. The first person to lead both the American League and National League in home runs, Crawford was still in his prime when Cobb eclipsed him, racking up nine batting titles in a row en route to 12 hitting championships. Cobb averred as to how Crawford didn't like playing second fiddle after having been cock of the walk. Crawford, who was one of delights in the first baseball oral history masterpiece "The Glory of

Their Times," said he and Cobb worked well together as teammates although they often didn't even speak to each other off the field and in the clubhouse. But however their relationship may have been ruptured, it was Cobb who pushed for Crawford's Hall of Fame election by the Veterans Committee in 1957.

Heilmann's relationship with Cobb was more of teacher and tutor, especially once Ty took over the manager's reins in 1921 for six seasons. "Slug" Heilmann, who had shown prowess with the bat prior with a pair of .300 seasons under his belt, blossomed in the Roaring Twenties, benefitting from a permanent move to the outfield from first base and winning four batting titles – all in odd-numbered years – with no average lower than .393 and including a .403 campaign in 1923. Heilmann, after hanging up his spikes, became a color commentator on Tigers radio broadcasts. Too sick with cancer to take the microphone for the 1951 season, Cobb reportedly told him on his deathbed he had been elected to the Hall of Fame, although the honor wouldn't come for another year, after Heilmann had died.

Manush didn't make it to the Tigers until 1923, when Cobb was player-manager. Heinie found himself having to excel just to get playing time. It was a common problem for Detroit in the pre-designated hitter. The 1900s featured Cobb, Crawford, Davy Jones and Matty McIntyre. The 1920s had Cobb, Heilmann, Manush, Bob Fothergill and even Red Wingo (.370 in 1925) competing for playing time. The pennant-winning Tigers of the 1930s featured Gee Walker, Pete Fox, Jo-Jo White, Hall of Famer Goose Goslin, and for one year Hall of Famer Al Simmons. Even the 1960s Tigers were loaded with Al Kaline, Willie Horton, Jim Northrup, Mickey Stanley, and pinch-hitter par excellence Gates Brown. Manush got a majority of outfield starts each of his five years with Detroit, copping the 1926 batting title with a .378 mark. But once his average sagged to a mere .298 in 1927, he was shipped to the St. Louis Browns in a lopsided-against-the-Tigers deal; Manush led the AL in hits and doubles the next season, taking second in AL MVP voting, and playing for another decade afterward.

D'Addona tosses in lots of from-the-source newspaper and magazine accounts to further the narratives in his biographical profiles -- a good thing, in this reader's judgment. What I hope he does next is publish an updated edition which would have to include Bobby Veach, a long-overlooked outfielder who toiled for the Tigers 1912-23 who led the AL in hits, doubles, triples, and three times in RBIs, with 11 .300-plus batting seasons in a Detroit uniform. "In Cobb's Shadow" lists for \$29.95 and can be bought directly from the publisher, McFarland & Co., at [www.mcfarlandpub.com](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com).

### **SHORT STRIPE** – By Mark Pattison

The scheduler-maker (see Todd Miller's story in the January 2016 issue of *Tigers Stripes*) graced us with seven straight days of Tigers baseball in the Society's birthplace along the Washington-Baltimore corridor. First is three-game set Monday-Wednesday, May 9-11, in Washington against the Nationals, followed by a four-game series Thursday-Sunday, May 12-15, against the Orioles in Baltimore. We've chosen Wednesday, May 11.,and Friday, May 13, as our "Mayo Day" games. We're angling for seats in the \$25-\$30 range. If you want in on one or both games, email Mark Pattison at [pattison\\_mark@hotmail.com](mailto:pattison_mark@hotmail.com). Use that email address if you'd like a calendar of Society events in the Mid-Atlantic region, including "Tiger Talk" dinners and farm team visits.

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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](mailto:toddprmtg@verizon.net)). **Editor:** Mark Pattison (202/829-9289, [pattison\\_mark@hotmail.com](mailto:pattison_mark@hotmail.com)). **Writer/ Sabermetrician:** David Raglin (703/556-0332 or 703/835-1198, [darags@ymail.com](mailto:darags@ymail.com)). **Membership Services Coordinator:** Pete Wright. The Mayo Smith Society was established in 1983 by Dale Petroskey, Dennis Petroskey, and Bill Mackay.