

# Tigers Stripes

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

Vol. 29, No. 2

Tigers Fans Who Always Care

March 2013

## VERLANDER AT 30 – By David Raglin

It sort of hit me like a lightning bolt. On Feb. 20, Justin Verlander turned 30 years old. Maybe because we saw him come up to the Tigers as a kid not long out of college, and he has been with the Tigers his whole career, but I still thought of him as a young player. Not that 30 is old, but it is definitely a milestone in a baseball career.

Given that, I decided it was time to look at Verlander in an historical sense; how does his career stack up against some of the other great pitchers? My first idea was to compare him to starters who have recently (say, in the last decade), made the Hall of Fame. However, we really can't do that because it is a very short list. Bert Blyleven was elected in 2011 in his last year of eligibility, Dennis Eckersley (who was a starter but made the Hall mostly based on his relief work) was elected in 2004, and before that you have to go to 1998 when Don Sutton made it in. (If you think about that, it is amazing that in 15 years, there has been just one starting pitcher elected to the Hall.)

Instead, I identified several pitchers currently eligible for election or active pitchers 30 or over who are on a path to the Hall. You may not agree that all of these pitchers are Hall of Famers -- I don't -- but all have either received significant support in Hall of Fame elections or have been prominently discussed as potential Hall of Famers.

Below are the 11 pitchers I identified along with their career statistics when they turned 30. (For a player born during that season, only his statistics before the actual birthday are included. For example, Jack Morris turned 30 on May 15, 1985, so the stats below are his career line as of his last start before he turned 30, on May 12, 1985. The last line of the table shows how Verlander ranks among the 12 pitchers. Note that for hits, runs, earned runs, home runs, walks and strikeouts, the rankings are based on those stats per inning pitched for the pitcher to make for comparison purposes. For example, Verlander's rank in strikeouts is fourth, using strikeouts per inning, instead of fifth in total strikeouts.

### **Justin Verlander Compared to Potential Hall of Fame Starters, Through Their 30th Birthday**

Pitcher	G	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	W	L	ERA
Justin Verlander	232	1553.2	1353	636	587	137	470	1454	124	65	3.40
Roger Clemens	263	1956.1	1630	677	608	125	534	1808	146	68	2.80
Tom Glavine	262	1721.0	1649	751	673	113	579	1031	124	82	3.52
Roy Halladay	224	1394.0	1369	629	565	121	342	980	99	50	3.65
Randy Johnson	195	1285.2	996	597	535	112	703	1380	83	64	3.75
Greg Maddux	301	2142.1	1896	791	685	109	563	1488	151	94	2.88
Pedro Martinez	296	1693.0	1262	553	501	129	467	1981	132	59	2.66
Jack Morris	240	1658.2	1501	726	669	155	591	958	111	79	3.63
Mike Mussina	223	1568.1	1452	643	610	166	369	1153	118	59	3.50
CC Sabathia	308	2027.1	1854	879	808	180	635	1700	148	84	3.59
Curt Schilling	232	988.1	880	417	383	80	291	800	52	52	3.49
John Smoltz	275	1869.0	1609	783	711	152	642	1579	118	93	3.42
Verlander Rank	8 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>

Verlander ranks lowest in categories such as games, innings pitched and hits allowed. For the games and innings pitched, some of that is due to the eras the pitchers pitched in. Verlander is rightfully considered a workhorse by today's standards, but even a few years ago, starters tended to throw more innings. Some of that is due to the fact that Verlander went to college, while some of these pitchers turned pro out of high school and therefore reached the majors at a younger age. For example, Verlander was 23 in his first full season in the majors. That is young, but most of these pitchers were in the majors by 21.

For most of the categories, Verlander ranks in the top half, between fourth and sixth. True, some of these did not blossom until later in their career. Nobody thought of Randy Johnson, Roy Halladay or Curt Schilling as potential Hall of Famers when they turned 30. But, still ranking in the top half of many categories when compared to this group is pretty good.

One problem with that table is that career stats are hard to digest. What does 1,553.2 innings pitched or 1,454 strikeouts mean? So, the below table gives you their stats per major league season. For players who bounced up and down from the minors or who pitched during the 1994 labor shutdown, I have approximated their number of major league seasons; you will see the results in the first column of the below table, MLS for Major League Seasons.

**Justin Verlander Compared to Potential Hall of Fame Starters, Through Their 30<sup>th</sup> Birthday**

Pitcher	MLS	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	W	L	ERA
Justin Verlander	7.0	222.0	193	91	84	20	67	208	18	9	3.40
Roger Clemens	7.7	254.1	212	88	79	16	69	235	19	9	2.80
Tom Glavine	8.0	215.1	206	94	84	14	72	129	16	10	3.52
Roy Halladay	8.2	170.0	167	77	69	15	42	120	12	6	3.65
Randy Johnson	6.0	214.3	166	100	89	19	117	230	14	11	3.75
Greg Maddux	9.0	238.0	211	88	76	12	63	165	17	10	2.88
Pedro Martinez	8.7	194.6	145	64	58	15	54	228	15	7	2.66
Jack Morris	7.2	230.4	209	101	93	22	82	133	15	11	3.63
Mike Mussina	7.4	212.0	196	87	82	22	50	156	16	8	3.50
CC Sabathia	9.6	211.2	193	92	84	19	66	177	15	9	3.59
Curt Schilling	7.0	141.2	126	60	55	11	42	114	7	7	3.49
John Smoltz	8.6	217.3	187	91	83	18	75	184	14	11	3.42

These stats look more like what you are used to seeing. Verlander's average season fits in very well with the guys on this list. He has a very impressive win-loss record, partly due to the strong Tigers offenses during his career but mostly due to his quality pitching and his ability to last deep into games and not depend on his bullpen. Some of the other pitchers have notable numbers. Roger Clemons averages 254.1 innings per season (wow!) and Randy Johnson, in the days before he found his control, walked over 100 men a season regularly.

Does that mean that Justin Verlander is going to the Hall? No, in the sense if he got hurt now and pitched a few games for the next three years to meet the ten-year minimum for the Hall, he would not get in. However, these stats show, not surprisingly, that he is on the patch for a trip to upstate New York a few years after he retires. If he makes it, he will join only two other Hall of Fame pitchers who spent a predominant part of their his careers in Detroit: Hal Newhouser and Jim Bunning (with Morris being a third if he makes it in.)

**THE NEW SCHEDULE** – By David Raglin

As you know, Major League Baseball made the Houston Astros move to the American League effective with the 2013 season, so each league will be made up of three five-team divisions. One of the reasons this move was made was to standardize the schedule.

In past years, the schedule a team played varied greatly from other teams they were competing with for postseason berths. Even intradivision rivals could play a vastly different schedule. Teams played between seven

and nine games against league opponents in the other division. Some teams had interleague rivals whom they played six games a year (as many games as they played many league rivals), and the original plan of one division playing another was only being loosely followed. For example, in 2012 the American League Central faced off against the National League Central, but one of the Tigers' interleague series was against the Colorado Rockies from the National League West.

The schedule in 2013 will be much more standardized. Teams will play their four divisional opponents 18 times each, made up of three series home and away (72 games total). They will play the other ten teams in their league seven times, one series home and away (70 games). For interleague play, a team will play each team in the designated corresponding division, plus one "rival" team. They will play four of the teams in the corresponding division in one three-game series. They will play the "rival" team and the remaining team in the corresponding division four times, in a pair of home-and-home series. Another consequence of the Astros' move is that with two 15-team leagues there will out of necessity always be an interleague series played.

For 2013, the corresponding division for the AL Central is the NL East. The Tigers will play three-game series against the Atlanta Braves (at home Friday, April 26-Sunday, April 28), the Philadelphia Phillies (away, Friday, July 26-Sunday, July 28), the New York Mets (away, Friday, Aug. 23-Sunday, Aug. 25), and the Miami Marlins (Friday, Sept. 27-Sunday, Sept. 29). That last series is the final series of the season for the Tigers, so if they go into the last three games of the season fighting for a playoff berth or playoff position, they will probably do it without DH Victor Martinez in the lineup. They will play the Washington Nationals in a pair of two-game series, in Washington on Tuesday, May 7-Wednesday, May 8 (the Mayo Smith Society is sponsoring an outing to the Tuesday game), and in Detroit on Tuesday, July 30-Wednesday, July 31.

The Tigers' National League rival is the Pittsburgh Pirates. The rivalry series are being handled in an interesting way. All 15 rivalry series will be held at the same time, Monday, May 27-Thursday, May 30. On Monday and Tuesday, the teams will play in one park (for us, Detroit), and the next two games in the other park (for us, Pittsburgh). That is the only time all year that there is an interleague "period" like we had in the past.

Therefore, except for the "rivalry" games and the one extra game against a team in the corresponding division, division rivals will play the same schedule. That was a key goal of Major League Baseball, which was concerned about teams competing for the same division title but playing vastly different schedules. However, the schedule is still heavily balanced toward intradivision games (18 games against each divisional rival and seven games against the teams in other divisions). Therefore, teams like the Tigers who play in a weak division will still get a big boost in the race for the wild card.

Buster Olney of ESPN each year rates the strength of the early-season schedule (about the first 40 games). He has the Tigers with the second easiest schedule in the American League for that period. Part of that is the easy division, but part of that is that the Tigers play both of their series against the woebegone Houston Astros early in the season. Another quirk is that, the Tigers' games against the White Sox are back-loaded; they face off for the first time on July 8 in the Tigers' 90th game, but then play almost a quarter of their games the rest of the way against each other.

### **BEST THIRD BASE SEASONS** – By David Raglin

Third base has been an interesting position in history for the Detroit Tigers. Probably the greatest third baseman in Tiger history was George Kell, who only played six and a quarter seasons with Detroit (although they were good seasons). The all-time leaders in games played at third for Detroit are Aurelio Rodriguez (1,236, by far the lowest of any defensive position leader in Tigers history), Don Wert (1,036), Brandon Inge (999), Tom Brookens (979), and Pinky Higgins (842).

Until 2012, the third baseman on the Tigers' championship teams have been among the weaker players on the team, almost always hitting low in the order. In 2011 and 2006, Brandon Inge played third and hit eight and ninth. Tom Brookens hit eighth and ninth in 1987, and Howard Johnson and company the same in 1984. Don Wert in 1968, Bob Maier in 1945, Pinky Higgins in 1940, and Marv Owen in 1934 and 1935 hit seventh or eighth in the days the pitcher hit ninth. While we don't have lineup info for the 1907-09 three-time pennant winners, their third baseman were among the teams weaker hitters. Only Aurelio Rodriguez was the exception, often hitting second for the 1972 Tigers despite hitting .236 with a .272 on-base percentage.

So, Miguel Cabrera’s season was an exception, to say the least. Let’s compare Cabrera in 2012 with the best offensive seasons of all time. We will use Bill James’ runs created to rank the hitters.

**Best Offensive Seasons at Third Base, Detroit Tigers**

Rk	Third Baseman	Year	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	BA	OBP	SLG	RC	RC/G
1	Miguel Cabrera	2012	161	622	109	205	40	0	44	139	66	.330	.393	.606	138	8.2
2	George Kell	1950	157	641	114	218	56	6	8	101	66	.340	.403	.484	123	7.1
3	Eddie Yost	1959	148	521	115	145	19	0	21	61	135	.278	.435	.436	113	7.8
4	George Kell	1949	134	522	97	179	38	9	3	59	71	.343	.424	.467	106	7.5
5	Marv Owen	1934	154	565	79	179	34	9	8	96	59	.317	.385	.451	103	6.7
6	Ray Boone	1956	131	481	77	148	14	6	25	81	77	.308	.403	.518	102	7.8
7	George Kell	1951	147	598	92	191	36	3	2	59	61	.319	.386	.400	97	6.0
T8	Marty McManus	1930	132	484	74	155	40	4	9	89	59	.320	.396	.475	96	7.1
T8	Tony Phillips	1991	146	564	87	160	28	4	17	72	79	.284	.371	.438	96	6.1
T8	Dean Palmer	1999	150	560	92	147	25	2	38	100	57	.263	.339	.518	96	6.0

Cabrera’s 2012 season was not surprisingly the best at the plate in Tigers history. Three of Kell’s six seasons in Detroit made the top 10, making it easy to see why he is the best third baseman in Tiger history despite his short tenure. Eddie Yost spent most of his career in Washington; it is not surprising give his bases on balls total that his nickname was “The Walking Man.” Marv Owen was a good player and part of a great infield. Ray Boone is the father of Bob Boone and grandfather of Aaron and Bret Boone. Marty McManus was a solid regular, mostly for the St. Louis Browns and the Tigers. Two more contemporary Tigers, Tony Phillips and Dean Palmer, close out the list.

**SHORT STRIPES** – By David Raglin and Mark Pattison

From Dave: Political pundit and noted baseball fan George Will recently appeared on the MLB Network talking about baseball in Washington. I did not see it, but from what I was told, the subject was baseball in Washington, and Will mentioned our little ol’ Mayo Smith Society as a group of baseball fans in Washington with loyalties to their hometown team. Some of you might not know that the Society was founded in 1983 as a breakfast club of expatriate Tigers fans who met each Friday for breakfast in the Longworth House Office Building cafeteria. Will is a member of the Emil Verban Society, a similar group of expatriate Cub fans. In 1989, the Mayo Smith Society beat the Emil Verban Society, 7-2, in a softball game (Will was not there).

From Mark: I can’t walk a couple of blocks to Mrs. Hickey’s store anymore and buy a couple packs of Topps baseball cards, but serious Tiger fans should take note that none other than Prince Fielder graces the cover of this year’s Series 1 packs and the boxes they come in.

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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.