

Tigers Stripes

The Newsletter of the

Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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SECOND DECISION – By David Raglin

Other than the health of key players like Miguel Cabrera, Victor Martinez and Jose Iglesias, there will not be much suspense in Lakeland this year. However, one of the key decisions that Brad Ausmus has to make his spring is who will replace the departed Torii Hunter as the #2 hitter in the lineup. There are no obvious candidates, but somebody will have to hit second (it's a rule). The three names that have been thrown out there the most are Alex Avila and Anthony Gose against righties, and Rajai David against lefties. Other outside possibilities are Yoenis Cespedes, J.D. Martinez, and Jose Iglesias. Let's look at their stats vs. lefties and righties. (For Cespedes, we use his whole career since, as we showed in the January *Tigers Stripes*, his platoon stats in 2014 were out of the ordinary. For Iglesias, we used 2013 since he did not play in 2014.). I show just batting average, on-base percentage, and slugging percentage to keep things simple. The key stat for the #2 slot, batting in front of the big guns, is on-base percentage, which is why it is in bold.

Candidates for the #2 Slot: Batting Average, On-Base Percentage, and Slugging Percentage

Tiger Hitter	Bats	Stats From	Versus Left-Handed Pitching			Versus Right-Handed Pitching		
			BA	OBP	SLG	BA	OBP	SLG
Alex Avila	L	2014	.226	.287	.302	.215	.340	.380
Yoenis Cespedes	R	2012-2014	.264	.310	.460	.279	.311	.466
Rajai Davis	R	2014	.356	.382	.557	.260	.330	.475
Anthony Gose	L	2014	.180	.241	.220	.238	.329	.312
Jose Iglesias	R	2013	.294	.341	.429	.308	.354	.362
J.D. Martinez	R	2014	.307	.362	.640	.318	.357	.523

For comparison's sake, the average #2 hitter in the American League in 2014 was at .260/.318/.391. (Notice how the numbers are much lower than in the hitter's era of about 20 years ago. We need to keep that in mind when we think about what is "good" or "bad".)

Fans tend to notice Alex Avila's low batting average, but he walks a lot against righties (54 walks in 341 plate appearances), giving him a well-above average on-base percentage of .340 against them. Gose, the other left, also had an above-average on-base percentage against righties. Davis was great against lefties and good against righties. If we assume that was a bit of an overreach, he still would be a good choice against lefties. Iglesias had a good on-base percentage against lefties and righties, but part of that was his extraordinary first half of the 2013 season where he had an unsustainable .414 batting average on balls in play (excluding home runs, walks, strikeouts, and times hit by pitch). At least it looks like he has basically no platoon differential, important for a right bat on a heavily right-handed team. Cespedes has neither a high batting average nor a good walk rate. That, along with his power, probably makes him the worst choice on this list to bat #2 (and he is probably not really a candidate). Martinez was balanced left/right and had a good on-base percentage, but the Tigers need his power later in the lineup.

This would indicate that Avila and Gose (and maybe Iglesias) would be good choices against righties, and Davis (and maybe Iglesias) against lefties. However, there is another important thing we want from a #2 hitter—baserunning ability.

Last month, we talked a bit about baserunning, but this month we want to get a bit more specific about certain aspects of baserunning: the ability to advance extra bases on a hit (like from first to third on a single), and to steal bases without being caught. At the top of the next page are the stats for 2014 for our candidates:

Candidates for the #2 Slot: Advancing on Hits and Stealing Bases

	1 st to 3 rd on a Single			2 nd to Home on a Single			1 st to Home on a Double			Total			SB	CS
	Moved	Chances	% Moved	Moved	Chances	% Moved	Moved	Chances	% Moved	Moved	Chances	% Moved		
Avila	2	23	9%	4	18	22%	0	6	0%	6	47	13%	0	3
Cespedes	7	30	23%	9	15	60%	8	9	89%	24	54	44%	4	0
Davis	13	23	57%	11	17	65%	6	6	100%	30	46	65%	36	11
Gose	9	22	41%	3	5	60%	2	5	40%	14	32	44%	15	5
Iglesias	7	21	33%	9	11	82%	1	5	20%	17	37	46%	5	2
J.D. Martinez	11	28	39%	7	16	44%	0	4	0%	18	48	38%	6	3
MLB Avg	-----	-----	28%	-----	-----	59%	-----	-----	44%	-----	-----	41%	-----	-----

Four of the candidates -- Cespedes, Gose, Iglesias and Martinez -- advance an extra base on a hit at about the major league average of 41 percent. Rajai Davis is much better than that at 65 percent. Alex Avila is much worse than average at only 13 percent. The only player on the list who is a big stolen base threat is Davis, although Gose was not bad with 15 stolen bases in limited playing time in 2014.

Avila's poor baserunning is enough of a reason to not put him in the #2 slot against right-handers, even with his good on-base percentage. The big guns do hit a lot of home runs, but they also hit a lot of singles and doubles. Cabrera hit 52 doubles, in fact, last year (although we hope a healthy Cabrera will turn some of those into home runs in 2015). I remember Jim Leyland expressing concern about the Tigers' station-to-station baserunning a few years ago, and having Avila in the middle of it would make that worse.

Therefore, the best choice, at this time at least, seems to be the centerfielder of the day (Gose or Davis), with an eye on Iglesias to see if he can get on base enough. The problem with a Gose/Davis platoon in the #2 slot is that if the opposing team changes pitchers, the Tigers either have to pinch-hit or have a hole in the lineup right before Cabrera and the Martinezes come up.

COMERICA PARK: GOOD FOR HITTERS OR PITCHERS? – By David Raglin

The Tigers are starting their 16th season at Comerica Park (my, how time flies!) When the stadium opened in 2000, the Tigers tried to make it somewhat of a pitcher's park, especially for right-handed power. Unfortunately, they then traded for Juan Gonzalez, who quickly showed how good of a job they'd done in that regard, and in 2003, they moved the bullpens from a right-field alcove to side-by-side spots in left field. They have now played 12 seasons with this current configuration, as new parks have popped up throughout baseball. Periodically, we've looked at how good of a pitcher's or hitter's park Comerica Park is, and it has been a few years since we've done that, so let's do it again.

How do we calculate a park factor? We could just, for example, add up the number of runs or home runs or something in each park and compare that to the average. However, that would be too simplistic and misleading. Let's say a team had really good hitting and poor pitching. There would be a lot of runs in their ballpark, but it would not be the park, it would be the team.

To try to take the team into effect, the best way to calculate park factor is to look at the number of runs, home runs, etc., in Comerica Park by both teams and the number in Tiger road games by both teams. Divide the number in Comerica by the number in other parks, multiply by 100, you have the park factor. A factor of 100 indicates it is a neutral park; higher means it happens more often there, and lower means it happens less often.

The annual Bill James Handbook, published by Baseball Info Systems, published data on park factors. They produce one-year and three-year park factors. The reason is, despite there being 81 games in a season, things do not even out over one year. For example, the Comerica Park park factors for runs over the last five years have been (starting in 2010 and going forward): 98, 106, 107, 114, and 100. Part of that is weather in a given year, part of that is the composition of the players on the team, and part of that is just statistical noise. They feel three years is enough time for things to even out. That might be true, but I decided to do five years, from 2010 to 2014. The main reason is that Target Field, the home park of the Tigers' divisional rival Minnesota Twins, opened in 2010 (the only park to open since was Marlins Park in the Nationals League).

Comerica Park – Park Factors, Using Data From 2010 to 2014

Category	R	H	1B	2B	3B	HR	HR-LHB	HR-RHB	FO
Comerica Park - Both Teams	3721	7498	5153	1388	204	753	310	443	663
Tiger Road Games - Both Teams	3549	7310	4961	1461	129	759	311	448	560
Park Factor (100 is Neutral)	105	103	104	95	158	99	100	99	118

What do these numbers mean? In games in Comerica Park, from 2010 to 2014, the park factor was 105, meaning that there were about five percent more runs in Tiger games at Comerica than in Tiger games in other parks. That is, of course, above average, but is that really high? To compare, for the three-year park effects published by the Bill James Handbook, taking into account Colorado’s Coors Field and its effect on their National League rivals, generally the park effects range from around 110 to 90, so 105 means that Comerica is a pretty good park for scoring runs. (Note the range of high to low in the league is different for each category.)

It seems most of that is due to it being a good park for hits, especially triples. For home runs, it is pretty neutral for both lefties and righties, and it has a lot of foul outs compared to other parks. That does not mean that the park effects are the same for each player. For example, the park factor may be neutral for lefty hitters, but we all know that fly balls in Comerica that go to the cutout in right-center near the out-of-town scoreboard often look like home runs but turn into long fly outs. I don’t have stats on this, but I’d presume that is made up somewhat by home runs down the line. Therefore, a lefty who has power down the line might do better in Comerica than a lefty power hitter who is more of a gap guy.

Park effects are important to take into account when judging players. Much of the discussion is based on perceptions of what people think and not the data. Sometimes, the perceptions are right (Kansas City’s Kaufmann Stadium and Seattle’s Safeco Field have been poor home run parks), but sometimes they are wrong (Fenway Park’s home run factor for 2012-2014 was 88 -- 72 for lefties and 103 for righties -- and Rangers Ballpark was neutral for homers over that time, good for lefties, but not righties). Many people still think of Comerica as a pitchers’ park, but except for the things we mentioned, it is not.

REST IN PEACE, DAVE BERGMAN -- By Mark Pattison

It was a shock to get the phone call in the middle of the afternoon Feb. 2 from David Raglin that 1984 Tigers first baseman Dave Bergman had died earlier that day. Bergman had fought bile duct cancer for three years. It was the same disease that killed another Tigers luminary, broadcaster Ernie Harwell.

Bergman will always be remembered for his 13-pitch at bat in the 10th inning against Toronto’s Roy Lee Jackson at Tiger Stadium in May, when Bergman uncorked a Jackson offering into the right field stands for a game-ending three-run homer to vanquish the Blue Jays 6-3 in an ABC “Monday Night Baseball” tilt. It had already been a charmed 1984 season, with Detroit’s 35-5 start. If the Tigers hadn’t been playing .857 ball, the Jays’ .667 start in the season’s first quarter would have been the talk of baseball. Bergman’s feat put more distance between Detroit and Toronto than the 257 miles it says on the map, and reasserted the Tigers’ dominance that season. As fate would have it, Bergman blasted another three-run extra-inning shot, this time in Toronto, to drive a nail in the Jays’ coffin that September.

If that’s all Bergman had done in his nine years in a Detroit uniform, that would have been enough. But he did so much more. Remember his single with one out in the ninth inning that broke up Nolan Ryan’s no-hit bid in an otherwise forgettable 1989 season? It was just one of two no-no’s he broke up that year. Or how about his defensive skills at first base, especially in preserving Jack Morris’ no-hitter vs. the White Sox in a nationally televised game the first weekend of the 1984 season? Inserted as a defensive replacement for Barbaro Garbey in the seventh inning, he made two unassisted putouts (including a line drive that surely would’ve gotten past most first sackers) and recorded three assists to Morris covering first in a prototypical display of slick fielding. And how about that hidden-ball trick pulled on Baltimore’s Alan Wiggins in 1987?

OK, if he had just been a quality player on the field, maybe that would have been enough. But there was still more to Bergman. He parlayed his career to be a savvy investment adviser. And he parlayed that in turn to be a trustee of CATCH, Caring Athletes Team for Children’s and Henry Ford Hospitals -- started by his

manager, Sparky Anderson -- and managed the assets of the Clubhouse Boys Scholarship Fund, which had been a pet project of longtime Tigers clubhouse manager Jim Schmakel. These teens, who work long, long days just for tips from the players, now have more of a future to bank on thanks to people like Bergman.

Bergman is the third player from the 1984 Tigers to pass away, preceded by reliever Aurelio Lopez and backup catcher Dwight Lowry. And at this stage, every death is one that's far too early. The Society had approached Bergman about being the guest speaker at its 2013 Annual Gathering. Bergman had initially accepted, but then realized he had a conflict with the Joe Niekro Foundation, established to raise awareness of brain aneurysms. Niekro was Bergman's best friend in the game; as Niekro was exiting the majors, he mentored a young Bergman. However, the Society was never able to connect again with Bergman for a make-good, and now that chance is gone forever. But Bergman will be missed for far more than a missed opportunity.

DAVE BERGMAN: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE -- By Deana Carr

I was asked to write a little bit about Dave Bergman because I was fortunate to have met him in the 12 years of Tigers Fantasy Camps that I have attended. Everything you have read about "Bergie" is true. He was a nice guy, a great coach and always willing to give help to someone when they needed it.

I attended several Fantasy Camps in Florida, my first one in January 1998 where I met Dave. I also attended one in Tiger Stadium the following summer where he was one of the three or four coaches. When I saw him in Detroit at that camp, it was like we were old friends. He loved to coach, even if it was people in their 40s, 50s, and 60s at those camps who were just doing it for fun. He wanted to teach us the right way about everything baseball, whether it was us going back home to play, or whether we were coaching kids and wanted to help them get better. I asked Bergie about the proper sliding technique one day. He got down on the ground with one knee bent and his hands in the air to show me the correct way to slide. The next January -- 1999, when I was in Florida for my second weeklong camp -- Dave was there. He was ALWAYS in the batting cages early in the mornings throwing batting practice, ready and willing to teach you anything that you were hoping to learn.

Dave did something for me at that camp that I will always remember. My mom lived in Florida, about an hour away from Lakeland. I'd come down to visit her for a few days before camp, she would drive me to Lakeland and drop me off for camp, then she would pick me up at the end of the week and I'd stay with her for a day or two before going home. The day before camp ended that year, I got a call that my mom had had a heart attack and was in the hospital. Since I was expecting her to pick me up when camp was done, I didn't have a car. I was trying to figure out how to get over to her an hour away, when Dave offered his rental car for me to take. "I was just going to drop it at the airport, anyway. Drive it to your mom's place and then just drop it off at the airport when you are done." He wanted no money for the use of the car. He just wanted me to be with my mom. That really touched me.

That was just one of many things about Bergie that made him the nice guy you have heard about. He will be missed.

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