

Tigers Stripes

The Newsletter of the



Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

April 2013

WINNING THE WORLD SERIES – By David Raglin

That's the only goal for the 2013 Detroit Tigers. As you will read later in the Spring Training Trip report, Mike Smith, the Tigers' director of baseball operations, spoke to us at the Opening Night Dinner at the Tigertown cafeteria. I asked Mike what I thought was a softball question about how it felt when Prince Fielder caught the popup that clinched the pennant for the Tigers. I expected something about the celebration and the good feelings that accompany such an achievement. Instead, Smith immediately said that he now has two "loser's rings" and he wants the World Series ring.

The good news for Smith is that the Tigers' odds of that are pretty good. We took a look at the projections from Baseball Prospectus. What they do is project what players will do and simulate the playing of all of the games in the season many times. The Tigers won an average of 88.5 games in the simulated seasons, but it is clear that this system produces win-loss projections that are very conservative; for instance those 88.5 wins is second in the majors only to the Reds at 89.0 wins. Part of that is that the system cannot predict in-season roster changes and the fact that some teams play much better or much worse than projected. The simulations give an "average" projection for each team, but in some simulated seasons, teams will play much better than "average" and some teams will play much worse. Even the Houston Astros made the playoffs in 0.7 percent of the simulated seasons. That might sound crazy, but a year ago the Oakland A's were considered to be terrible in the spring and yet they made the playoffs.

Where this is more interesting is they also provide the percentage of times teams won their division, won a wild-card spot, and won the World Series. The Tigers won the World Series in 12.1 percent of the simulated seasons, the highest in baseball. That is because they are a good team that plays in a weak division; only the Indians had a simulated winning percentage over .500, and it was only .502. The Tigers won their division in 66.5 percent of the simulated seasons; only the Reds (63.7 percent) and the Dodgers (52.8 percent) were over 50 percent.

Of course, nobody wins anything on paper and on Opening Day, everybody starts at 0-0. Still, we have to feel good about the chances of our Tigers as we prepare to start what we hope will be a season to remember.

NOTHING BETTER THAN OPENING DAY -- By Kevin O'Neil

"There's nothing like a home opener, whether it's at home or on the road," once quipped baseball's greatest statesman Yogi Berra. And who are we to argue with Yogi!

Naturally, we'd like all Opening Days to be in Detroit but we know that doesn't happen. But as real baseball fans, we're all just happy when spring training is done and the games count for real no matter where they're played.

This year marks the Tigers' 113th Opening Day. Bennett Park, Navin Field, Briggs Stadium, Tiger Stadium and Comerica Park have hosted 53. Their Opening Day record is 50-59-1, the tie coming in 1927.

The Tigers' first Opening Day, and probably one of their most remarkable, was held at Bennett Park April 25, 1901, their first season in the American League. The Tigers made it memorable as they trailed the Milwaukee Brewers 13-4 heading into the bottom of the ninth before rallying to score 10 runs to defeat the Brewers 14-13. The 13 runs represent the most runs scored against the Tigers in their Opening Day history. Ironically, the game was scheduled for April 24 but was postponed due to snow and cold; we've all sat through a few of those. Opening Days have also seen their share of drama. On April 13, 1929, Earl Whitehill pitched 10.2 innings against Cleveland only to lose in the bottom of the 11th.

One of the greatest Opening Day pitching performances was turned in by Tommy Bridges on April 12, 1932, at Navin Field. Bridges pitched 13 innings of seven-hit ball only see to see the Indians score three runs in

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the top of the 13th to beat the Tigers 4-1. Bridges' defense let him down as the Tigers committed five errors, three by shortstop Billy Rogell. Bridges was also the recipient of more Opening Day bad luck on April 21, 1943, as Cleveland scored a run in the bottom of the ninth to beat Detroit 1-0.

The Tigers have enjoyed some great Opening Days themselves. Harry Heilmann went 4-for-5 with a home run and four RBI and Ty Cobb went 3-for-4 as Detroit beat the St. Louis Browns 9-6 on April 18, 1923. Opening Day in 1934 saw the Tigers field a team with four future Hall of Famers: Hank Greenberg, Charlie Gehringer, Goose Goslin and Mickey Cochrane. In 1935 the Tigers lost 7-6 to Chicago White Sox but went on to win their first World Series, and 1936 saw Schoolboy Rowe shut out the Indians 3-0 as the Tigers played their first game as World Series champions.

For many Tigers, Opening Day marked the start of their own individual streaks as Opening Day fixtures. Charlie Gehringer played his first of 14 straight opening days on April 11, 1928. Hall of Famer Hal Newhouser drew five straight Opening Day assignments (six overall) starting on April 17, 1945. Prince Hal's Opening Day record was 4-2.

On April 13, 1954, a 19-year-old from Baltimore named Al Kaline started his amazing streak of playing in 21 straight Opening Days in a 3-0 win over the Baltimore Orioles. On April 12, 1955, Kaline went 2-for-4 against the Kansas City Athletics as he went on to become the youngest batting champion in history at age 20, a record he still holds.

April 8, 1968, saw the Tigers lose to Boston 7-3 at Tiger Stadium after losing the pennant on the last day of the season in 1967 to those same Red Sox. The Tigers went on to win their third World Series -- which for many of us was our first one.

On April 6, 1970, Mickey Lolich pitched his first of five straight Opening Days, going the distance in each one, recording a 3-2 record. Both his losses were by one run.

April 7, 1978, was momentous for Tiger fans as they saw the best double-play combination in baseball history. Lou Whitaker appeared in the first of his 17 Opening Days and Alan Trammell his first of 16. The Tigers' 6-2 victory over the Toronto Blue Jays was also bittersweet as Mark "The Bird" Fidrych made his only Opening Day appearance, pitching a complete game. For Fidrych, he started only two more games in '78 before arm problems ended his season. He didn't return until September 1979 and was never the same.

Jack Morris made his first of a record 11 straight Tigers Opening Day assignments on April 10, 1980, defeating Kansas City 5-1. His record on Opening Day was 7-4.

Kirk Gibson had what Al Kaline called the greatest Opening Day he ever saw on April 1, 1986. After Dwight Evans of the Red Sox deposited Jack Morris' first pitch of the season into the bleachers, Gibson went 4-for-4 with two home runs, five RBI and two stolen bases as the Tigers dumped the Red Sox 6-5 at Tiger Stadium.

The Tigers were part of baseball history as they played the Tampa Bay Devil Rays in their first-ever game April 1, 1998, in St. Petersburg, Fla., spoiling the Rays' major-league debut 11-6.

On the greatest Opening Days in all of baseball history -- and certainly the biggest one in the brief history of Comerica Park -- took place on an unusually warm April 5, 2005, as Dmitri Young slammed three home runs, going 4-for-4 with five RBI as the Tigers defeated the Kansas City Royals 11-2.

Opening Days the last couple of years have brought a tremendous sense of hope, excitement and optimism as the Tigers have been consistent contenders hoisting pennants on Opening Days in 2007 and 2012. This year another overflow crowd will watch as the Tigers raise their 2012 American League Championship pennant against the team they beat to win that championship, the New York Yankees.

LAKELAND 2013 – By David Raglin and Mark Pattison

The road to what could be a memorable 2013 season began in Lakeland, Florida, and 35 Society members gathered there to see what the Tigers have to offer. The trip began Saturday, March 16, with two games. Most of the group made the trek to Jupiter (Florida, that is) to see the Tigers beat the Cardinals 3-0, led by Shawn Hill's four shutout innings. Hill is a non-roster invitee for the Tigers who the team signed to provide starting pitching depth. Hill has been a good pitcher when healthy, but that has not been often. His best season was in 2007 when he went 4-5 with a 3.42 ERA in 16 starts for the Washington Nationals. He was considered a

rising star for the Nats after Tommy John surgery but further elbow injuries cut his career in Washington short. When the Nats released him, Hill signed with the Padres but had to go through Tommy John surgery a second time. The next stop for the Toronto-area native was with the Blue Jays, but he later went to the Marlins before returning to the Jays. The Tigers signed him as a minor-league free agent and he has pitched well a couple of times. Look for him to go to Toledo as possible insurance.

Hill started because the Tigers decided not to make Justin Verlander make the long trip. Instead, several Society members saw Verlander face the Nats' AAA lineup. Verlander dominated for three innings but some questionable strike calls and some bloop hits gave him the loss in the game. Overall, he looked fine.

Sunday, the group saw the Tigers lose to the Nationals. It was a slugfest, with the Nats winning 12-10, thanks to some relief pitching that angered Jim Leyland. That night was the annual Opening Night Dinner at the Tigertown cafeteria. That is always a great place to be because the room is full of Tigers history. Pictures and uniforms of Tigers greats line the walls, and laminated into the tables are thousands of Tiger baseball cards, pictures, yearbook covers, and newspaper clippings. As mentioned before Mike Smith spoke to the group.

Smith noted how starter Max Scherzer was intentionally started slowly this spring after suffering arm miseries near the end of the regular season last year -- not to mention his seeing three rounds of postseason action.

He had high praise for some prospects in the farm system, notably catchers Bryan Holaday and James McCann and outfielder Stephen Moya. Moya, a Venezuelan, was signed at age 16 standing 6'3" and weighing 160 pounds. Now Moya is 6'7", 230. He made a nice running catch as a late-inning replacement in one game.

Smith also told the story of how Detroit came to acquire both Anibal Sanchez and Omar Infante from the Marlins near the interleague trading deadline. It seems the Marlins, who had been stumbling, still had an outside shot at a wild-card berth were they to sweep a critical weekend series. Instead, Miami lost two out of three games. After the series, the Marlins' GM sent a text message to Detroit president/CEO/GM Dave Dombrowski saying, in effect, "It looks like we'll be dealing. Are you still interested in Sanchez and Infante?"

Monday saw the group head to Viera to see the Washington and Detroit at the Nats' park. The game saw the Tigers use a DH while the National League Nationals had the pitcher hit. The Tigers won 4-1. This was the point in the spring where regulars often play even on the road; the Detroit lineup features seven everyday players. Tuesday was back at home against the Rays. The local club (about an hour from Tropicana Field) garnered a fair amount of fan support. The weather was expected to be cloudy with some rain expected but the baseball gods shined down on us with a sunny day. Doug Fister struggled through 3.2 innings before his lack of command showed in the six-run fourth (although a ground ball through Fielder's legs did not help).

Should we be worried about such a start? Not really. Fister is the kind of pitcher who sometimes has to work through stuff. You have to be careful about focusing too much on spring training stats. Fister will be fine.

However, after yet another Bruce Rondon blow-up, trip regular Cliff Corn noted that there was black smoke blowing over the roof behind first base. "Black smoke," he observed. "Looks like we don't have a closer yet."

Wednesday was an off-day for the major league team. That is, all but Rick Porcello and his catcher, Brayan Pena. It is become much more common for teams to have starting pitchers throw in minor league games because of long trips, facing a divisional rival, or to stay on rotation. Porcello pitched on Wednesday for the latter reason. Minor league day can be a lot of fun. There are two games going on at once on the back fields, with the setting more reminiscent of a rec league with bleachers for a handful of people and the ability to be right up at the fence. It's especially great to watch a major league pitcher from that close, and Porcello dominated the Class A Astros hitters. The atmosphere was heightened by the presence of scouts from several major league clubs and the top Tigers brass. There was a poignant moment when second baseman Colin Kaline came out of the game and his grandfather came down from the tower overlooking the field to chat with him and give him a noogie or two.

Thursday was a night game against the Astros, and Verlander was on the mound. The Astros hit him hard, with three home runs, but again, it is spring training and nobody was worried. Friday was another trip to Viera, and the Tigers exploded again in the seventh inning. Most of the regulars got the day off, with the lineup full of players who were battling for the last few roster spots. Matt Tuiaosopo had another strong game with a

home run, but the star of the game was Drew Smyly, who kept the Washington opening day lineup to one run. Saturday was the last day of the trip, and the Tigers put together their third seventh-inning rally of the trip to grab a comeback win versus the Yankees. The group noticed that there were far fewer Yankees fans in Lakeland than in previous years.

Other trip events included the daily softball practices, which saw Dave Raglin take to the mound to throw over 1,000 pitches over the week (there are no pitch counts in slow-pitch softball.) G.F. Korreck had some snazzy T-shirts commemorating the Society’s 30th annual trip to Lakeland with “MAYO 30” on the back of each shirt, plus the century-old Orange Tigers mascot adorning both the front of the shirt and some bonus baseball caps.

The 2013 Spring Training Trip was a big success. Join us in 2014 for the trip to sunny Lakeland!

SHORT STRIPES

The Society has just two tickets left for its “Mayo Day” outing Tuesday, May 7, 7:05 p.m., against Washington. However -- probably because we just cinched the transaction the week before the Spring Training Trip, we still have 17 tickets left for our other “Mayo Day,” Sunday, June 2, 1:35 p.m., in Baltimore. Tickets for each game are \$20 apiece. Send a check made out to “Mayo Smith Society” to Mark Pattison, 1221 Floral St. NW, Washington, DC 20012.

Did you know a Tiger holds the record for hitting streak to conclude a career? It was none other than Magglio Ordonez, who had an 18-game streak in September 2011, well before anyone (himself included) expected his playing days to be over a month later. It was a Hall of Famer whose record Ordonez broke – and he, too, had no idea his career would come to a sudden end. The player was Ed Delahanty, whose 16-game hitting streak in 1903 survived for more than a century. Delahanty, booted off a train, had an unfortunate encounter with Niagara Falls.

Society member Aviva Kempner now has an expanded version of the DVD of her Peabody award-winning documentary “The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg,” which includes a phone interview with Ted Williams, more fun fan stories from U.S. Sen. Carl Levin (another Society member!), Alan Dershowitz and Walter Matthau, new interviews with Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and much more. Go to hankgreenbergfilm.org for ordering information. New to the Greenberg genre is John Rosengren’s book “Our Hank: The 80th Anniversary of Baseball's Hebrew Hammer.” If you’re in the Washington area, they’ll make a joint appearance Thursday, April 4, 7:30-9 p.m., at the D.C. Jewish Community Center at 16th and R Streets NW. Admission is \$10, \$8 for seniors.

Remember to join our Mayo Smith Society group on Facebook. Members, including those from the Society’s brain trust, post new material nearly every day -- a combination of commentary, records, and a this-date-in-Tigers history feature.

There was an error in last month’s Stripes. Teams play divisional rivals 19 times, not 18, and teams play six non-divisional rivals seven times and four teams six times (for Detroit, the “sixes” are: New York, Baltimore, Tampa Bay, and Los Angeles).

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For **Detroit Tigers Lists and More**, autographed by

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