

Tigers Stripes

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Mays Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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A TENTH OF THE WAY THROUGH THE SEASON -- By David Raglin

After 17 games, about a tenth of the way through the season, the Tigers are 8-9, after dropping five of six to key division rivals Kansas City and Cleveland. It's early enough in the season that we don't want to get too much into the stats. Thanks change quickly this time of year; if we had written this article a week earlier before the Royals and Indians series, it would have been much different!

The Tigers have scored 4.24 runs per game and allowed 4.41 runs per game (compared to a league average of about 3.96 runs scored/allowed per game.) That matches what we've seen with our eyes; the hitting has not been too bad (although after scoring 4+ runs in each of the first 12 games, they have scored three or less runs each of the last five games.) Here are the stats of the individual hitters, ranked by Bill James' Runs Created stat:

Detroit Tiger 2016 Hitting Stats Through April 24, 2016

Tiger Hitter	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
Ian Kinsler	17	75	15	25	3	0	4	12	2	14	.333	.354	.533	.888	14	7.1
J.D. Martinez	17	64	8	20	3	0	2	6	7	14	.313	.384	.453	.837	12	7.0
Jarrod Saltalamacchia	13	42	8	11	3	0	6	15	6	18	.262	.354	.762	1.116	12	10.4
Nick Castellanos	16	58	7	19	3	0	2	10	2	17	.328	.344	.483	.827	10	6.5
Victor Martinez	17	53	6	14	5	0	2	10	4	5	.264	.328	.472	.799	8	5.4
Jose Iglesias	16	53	8	16	1	0	0	1	6	4	.302	.373	.321	.694	7	4.9
Miguel Cabrera	17	63	7	13	3	0	1	6	8	13	.206	.296	.302	.597	6	3.1
Justin Upton	17	70	7	15	4	0	1	3	3	30	.214	.247	.314	.561	5	2.4
Anthony Gose	14	46	4	8	0	0	1	2	5	19	.174	.255	.239	.494	3	2.1

Like last year, Ian Kinsler is off to a great start, as is J.D. Martinez. The next two names deserve special mention. Jarrod Saltalamacchia is off to a tremendous start. He has filled in while starting catcher James McCann has been on the disabled list, and has pounded the ball. Is Salty this good of a hitter? Of course not, but it does suggest that he is back to being the hitter he was with the Red Sox when he hit 16, 25, and 14 home runs over three consecutive seasons. He is not a middle-of-the-order hitter given that his on-base percentage has often been below .300, but this stretch shows that he can be an important contributor to the 2016 Tigers, especially given the fact that he gives the team one of the few left-handed bats against righthanders. We are immodestly noting that we suggested that the Saltalamacchia signing was one of the best under-the-radar off-season signings (we mention that because we get many predictions wrong, too...).

We also thought Nick Castellanos might be ready for a breakout year at the plate, and he is off to a very good start. There are a couple of red flags: His two walks and 17 strikeouts is not an ideal ratio there, and his fielding has not been very good (he is already five runs worse than an average third baseman according to Baseball Info Systems' Defensive Runs Saved) However, this is a key season for him to show that he can hit, and so far, he has. That is especially important given the Tigers lack of young, controllable, cheaper talent to counterbalance the salaries of players like Miguel Cabrera and Justin Upton.

Ah, Miggy and Upton, you see them at the bottom of this list. I don't think anybody is worried about Miggy. Even when he has been hurt the last few years he has played very well, and he is healthy now. Tigers fans seem more concerned about Justin Upton. Part of it is a lack a familiarity. We forget how good Upton is

since we did not see him do it. However, as the table shows, this is far from the first time he has had a really bad 17-game stretch. Just going back two years we find a bad stretch each year:

Justin Upton Slumps, 2014-2016 (2016 Through April 24)

Justin Upton	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
May 30-June 21, 2014	17	65	8	11	1	0	1	4	4	17	.169	.217	.231	.448	3	1.5
June 28-July 26, 2015	17	59	5	8	0	0	2	4	5	17	.136	.237	.198	.435	3	1.4
April 5-24, 2016	17	70	7	15	4	0	1	3	3	30	.214	.247	.314	.561	5	2.4

Yes, the strikeouts are worse this year but the overall numbers were worse in the 2014 and 2015 slumps. When we were on the Mayo spring training trip this year, several people were worried because Upton did not look good. Then the last day we were there, he hit two massive home runs which helped make the group feel a little better. The lesson: Don't worry, Justin Upton will hit.

The pitching is more of a concern. In particular, the starting pitching seems to have many of the same problems the starting pitching had last year: a lack of depth. They are not lasting deep enough into games: Their 5.22 innings per start is the third worst in the league ahead of just Boston (5.20) and Baltimore (5.08). To compare, the league average is 5.68 and two teams, Toronto and Chicago, are above six at 6.15 and 6.13. The Tigers' rebuilt bullpen has pitched well except for Francisco Rodriguez at times, but they cannot hold that up pitching four innings a game. Jordan Zimmermann has pitched well and Justin Verlander has had three good starts out of four. The others have been very disappointing, and either they have to get it together or the Tigers need to find replacements at some point.

MEMORIES OF PAUL CAREY

We asked our members via email their memories of Paul Carey, the beloved play-by-play institution who worked beside the equally beloved Ernie Harwell for 19 seasons of Tigers baseball on WJR (760 AM) and passed away on April 12 at the age of 88. Here's what you had to say.

"I loved how the Tiger broadcasts began on WJR with the roar of the Tigers, Paul Carey saying 'Detroit Tigers baseball is on the air,' and then the always-familiar march. Carey's deep-bass voice, so clean and pure, made it sound so official: Detroit Tiger baseball was on the air." – David Raglin

"As a teenager and college student listening on a transistor radio under my pillow to late-night broadcasts of Tigers games on the West Coast, I could always count on Paul Carey's booming voice waking me up sometime during the middle innings, after having drifted off to sleep. Immediately after Paul announced the score, or after listening to a half inning, I would fall back to sleep and would not be fully awake the next morning until J.P. McCarthy played a recording of Paul's game recap." – Todd Miller

"Besides all the memories that we all share of his distinctive voice combined with Ernie Harwell on transistor radios across Michigan and the Midwest. But there is a cherished moment I will always remember shopping at a local grocer after Carey had retired. As I'm looking down one aisle, having no idea whether I'm in right aisle or not (typical for a guy who grocery shops once or twice a year), I hear this distinctive voice asking a grocery worker where an item was located. I knew instantly whose voice it was, but it couldn't be. I can't remember exactly what this voice was asking to find, and to be frank, it didn't matter, but it was just one more time to hear this voice that I was blessed to hear on my transistor radio for so many years. I snuck a quick look around the corner to confirm, and yes it was Paul Carey. I simply smiled and nodded, which was returned in kind." – Shawn D. Ellis

"Back in the late 1980s Ernie Harwell sent me an audiocassette with some small snippets of Harry Heilmann doing some Tigers games -- the only surviving audio that I know of from Harry's 17 years of Tigers broadcasts on the radio. I was thrilled to get this and I immediately did some research to pinpoint the exact year and game situation for each segment and then wrote a script to introduce each one in chronological order. I then asked Ernie if he could do this accompanying introduction to each segment. Ernie declined but recommended Paul Carey to do it. I contacted Paul and he was glad to do it since he had his own fond memories of Heilmann

on the radio. It turned out to be a good choice and Paul's wonderful voice was a perfect fit as he made this little remembrance of Harry a treasure that I still love to listen to every so often. Not many of us are old enough to remember Heilmann on the radio but as good as Harwell was he didn't have the personal connection to Tiger history as Harry and having Paul Carey help us remember the old days also helps us remember Carey's own wonderful radio voice." – Marc Okkonen

"I was taking my new son-in-law to his first Tiger game and through another rather remarkable story he had finagled an invitation to visit the broadcast booth so I could meet Ernie (not knowing I already had). Showing up about 45 minutes before game time we were ushered into the booth. I was as thrilled to meet Paul as I was to see Ernie again. My son-in-law said, 'Now, which one of you sounds like God?' Ernie said, 'That's him. He sounds like God and I sound like hell.' I told them I wished I had brought a ball for them to sign and Ernie reached into the pocket of an old overcoat hanging on a peg on the wall and produced one, signed it, and handed it to me. 'Would you sign it too?' I asked Paul. 'Oh, you don't want my signature,' he said. But of course, I did, and he relented. I still have the ball signed by them both and don't think I will ever meet a pair of more gracious men. What a privilege to have them call our games for so many years." – Jim Tice

"I must admit, I am in the small minority that preferred Paul to Ernie -- albeit verrrry slightly. My favorite memory is of Sunday doubleheaders -- particularly the second game, when Paul would get to do the first three and last three innings. Sparky would usually empty the bench, so guys like Lynn Jones, Stan Papi and Bill Fahey would get a start, and we would listen all day around the neighborhood Wiffle ball game. The other vivid memory is of the postgame show, so professionally performed in an era where you had to wait until the afternoon paper to find out who won or lost the day before. The extra emotion in Paul's voice on the night of September 18, 1984, as he described Randy O'Neal's seven shutout innings vs. Milwaukee clinching the American League East crown, ensuring he would get to call his first postseason series. He handled the role of Robin to Ernie's Batman with such grace and ease -- as comfortable as your favorite pair of slippers. If I had a 'bucket list,' it would include one more Paul Carey postgame show."—Scott Byrne

"The final games of the 1991 season had the Tigers playing the Orioles in a weekend series at old Memorial Stadium in Baltimore. That Friday, after Ernie and Paul met with President George H.W. Bush at the White House, the Michigan congressional delegation sponsored a luncheon on Capitol Hill honoring the revered broadcasters on the eve of their retirement. Although Paul had planned to leave after the '91 campaign, Ernie was forced out unfairly by Tigers management, which claimed his skills were declining.

"Thanks to Society co-founder Dale Petroskey, Dave Raglin and I, along with several other Society members, were guests at the luncheon, which was emceed by then-Orioles and ESPN broadcaster Jon Miller. When I congratulated Paul on his distinguished career and thanked him for making it so enjoyable to listen to the Tigers, win or lose, he replied in his characteristically humble way, "It's the players who make the game exciting, not me. Thanks for listening all these years."

"Dale Petroskey concluded the testimonials by saying, 'In baseball, like life, nothing lasts forever ... Unfortunately, Ernie and Paul are leaving us before we're ready to let go. Unlike with ballplayers, we can't tell their skills have diminished. That's because they haven't. Maybe another reason it's so hard to let go is the greatest broadcasting team in Tigers history – maybe the game's history – still doesn't realize they're anything special. That's what makes them special. On behalf of Mayo Smithers everywhere, thank you, guys, for filling our homes, our cars, our backyards and our hearts with such warmth. You have taught us to love baseball, and to appreciate it, and we appreciate you more than we could ever show you.'" –Todd Miller

"This isn't much but I'll mention it anyway. I believe it was at a Mayo Smith meeting when Paul was a guest just prior to his retirement. I was able to get his autograph and said to him, 'Thanks for everything, Paul.' He looked up at me and replied, 'No, it is I who should thank you.' I think these few words pretty much define the character of this man." – Art Neff

For more on Paul Carey, you can read his SABR (Society for American Baseball Research) biography by Matt Bohn at <http://sabr.org/node/26311>. This biography appeared in the SABR biography book "Detroit Tigers 1984: What a Start! What a Finish!", a book of the biographies of all of the '84 Tigers, edited by Mark Pattison and David Raglin.

TENDING A CROP OF PROSPECTS DOWN ON THE FARM – By Mark Pattison

Ever since the Tigers moved their Double-A franchise to Erie, Pa., in 2000, I've looked forward to following potential future Tigers when the SeaWolves head to Bowie, Md., a 35-minute drive from my home, to play the Baysox, a Baltimore farm club. This year is no exception. Erie was still working its way north, and the April 11-13 series in Bowie was just the SeaWolves' second of the 2016 season. That means there's not a lot of history to go on. Still, it's good when your team takes two out of three.

It's bad, though, when you storm to a 6-0 lead in the first inning of the series opener off Orioles hurler Brian Matusz, making a rehab appearance (he got in all his rehab pitches by facing 10 batters in the inning). The big blow was a three-run homer by Erie catcher Austin Green. (Despite James McCann's stint on the disabled list with the parent club, only backup catchers were moved up within the system to guarantee regular work for the projected starters.) Well, what made a 6-0 lead bad? It's bad when your starter, Brennan Smith, blows the lead by surrendering two runs in the bottom of the first and five more in the second. Even though Erie tied it in the third, Smith coughed up a leadoff home run to start the fourth and was gone one batter later in an 11-9 loss.

In much colder weather the next day, Erie evened up the series with a 10-2 win, with designated hitter Dean Green collecting four RBI in the game. As luck would have it, this was the game I didn't witness.

The rubber match -- with an 11:05 a.m. first pitch to allow hordes of schoolkids to attend and for Erie to endure a 373-mile bus ride back home -- also resulted in a SeaWolves victory, a 4-3 win.

One player who makes a near-immediate impression is shortstop Gustavo Nunez. He was swinging a nifty bat one week into the season, and has impressive range, which makes you think that if Dixon Machado doesn't work out, Nunez is next in line -- or, if Machado indeed works out, Nunez would be another trading chip in a seemingly endless supply of talented Tigers minor-league middle infielders. Nunez, though, committed an error in each game; he may need to learn when to hold on to the ball after smothering it with his great range. On the other hand, he made a great tag on a high-and-inside throw from Erie catcher Tim Remes to nab a Bowie pinch-runner trying to steal second base in the bottom of the ninth in the 4-3 Erie victory. Either that, or he did a great job selling it to the umpire, which is an even more valuable commodity.

Second baseman Alberto Gonzales was also wielding a mean stick in the season's first week, but he was caught loafing on a popup caught by the Baysox first baseman next to the dugout and was doubled off first base to end the Erie eighth inning. Gonzalez was pulled in the bottom of the ninth for Harold Castro, ostensibly for defensive purposes.

Erie's Opening Day pitcher, righthander Cole Riordan, started the 4-3 win. Between surrendering two home runs to Bowie, he retired 14 consecutive batters. Riordan gave up one other hit in his 6.2 innings, striking out six and walking none. The aforementioned Smith emerged from the series opener with a 21.50 ERA -- which is better than Tommy Collins' season debut against the Trenton Thunder: one-third of an inning, five earned runs and a 135.00 ERA. The bullpen corps looks more stable; Joe Mantiplay and Lendy Castillo each had two scoreless outings in Bowie, and Paul Voelker, the SeaWolves' closer, racked up two strikeouts to bookend the ninth inning of the 4-3 win. With any luck, I hope to issue a couple more reports on Erie road trips later this season.

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