

Tigers Stripes

The Newsletter of the



Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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SO FAR, SO GOOD! -- By David Raglin

While the expectations for this season were low, the Tigers have played some entertaining and somewhat successful baseball over the first three and a half weeks. Through the Royals series that ended on Sunday, April 22, the Tigers are 9-11 and could easily have been over .500. This is usually the toughest issue of *Tigers Stripes* to write because you really can't say much over 20 games. A week ago, the Tigers were hitting .216/.292/.327 with five home runs, and now they are at .249/.316/.396 with 15 home runs. If you get *Stripes* in the mail, everything may be different by the time you read this. Sparky Anderson famously would always say that you can't really tell anything about a team until they'd played 40 games. Despite that, we're going to try...

AND THE WINNERS ARE... – By David Raglin

Biggest surprise: This might be the easiest choice—JaCoby Jones. I admit that I had given up on Jones, and one good week does not make a player or a season, but he has been on fire! Jones started the season on the bench after barely making the team out of camp, but after playing nine games of 4-for-31 with one double, Mikie Mahtook was sent down and Jones was inserted into left field. In his first nine games of 2018, Jones has hit .291 with a double, a triple, and two homers in 31 at-bats, including a walk-off homer against the Royals.

An honorable mention goes to Leonys Martin. We wrote in our season preview that Martin needed to hit the ball on the ground more to be successful. Clearly he does not read *Tigers Stripes*, as he has many more fly balls than ground balls this year, but it is working, giving the Tigers a leadoff hitter with a .346 on-base percentage.

MVP: If you believe WAR, it'd be between two pitchers, Matthew Boyd and Francisco Liriano. Both have pitched well, but we're going with Jeimer Candelario. The Candy Man and Nicholas Castellanos are the only players to have played every inning of all 20 games. Candelario, Castellanos, and Miguel Cabrera (the other player to have played in all 20 games) are virtually tied in runs created and runs created per game (Candelario 15 and 6.8, Castellanos 14 and 6.7 and Cabrera 13 and 6.7). Candelario has been a much better fielder than his fellow C-man.

Biggest disappointment: I'm not sure if Jordan Zimmermann's poor start is a surprise, but it is very disappointing. He suffered terrible luck when a line drive hit him in the jaw in the first inning of his third start, but in the two starts before that and the start after, he gave up four, six, and four runs. We could be in the same boat with him as we were with Dontrelle Willis, where he is in the rotation only because of his contract.

Second on the list are the unnamed umpires who somehow overturned the Tigers' Opening Day win against the Pirates. Home plate umpire Mike Everitt got the call right, ruling that Castellanos had scored to give the Tigers a walk-off win. However, Castellanos was called out on replay, on an angle that they must not have shown the fans, because none of the replays we saw definitively showed him out. The umpires refused to explain their reasoning afterwards, the usual policy.

Biggest statement: Manager Ron Gardenhire has made a statement that he expects performance and will hold players accountable. Mahtook was sent down after nine games and Jones given the left field job. Then, after a poor outing against the Royals, Drew VerHagen was designated for assignment despite being out of options. After that game, Gardenhire said, "That was kind of scary. That's misfiring. We're trying to find spots where we can use him because he hasn't pitched in a few days. We needed him to get a couple of outs and he lost it." Even though the Tigers might not have the talent to compete and win against the good teams, that does not mean that Gardenhire will accept losing games they could win. The Tigers have shown quite a bit of resiliency this year, playing hard no matter the score. On Opening Day, they gave up four runs in the top of the

ninth but turned around and got four in the bottom of the ninth. They may not be great, but they never play like they are out of it.

Feast or famine: The Tigers are 3-3 against the Royals. Against every other team they've played, they are either winless or have a perfect record. They are 3-0 versus Baltimore and the White Sox, 0-1 against the Yankees, 0-3 versus Pittsburgh, and 0-4 versus Cleveland. That makes them 9-3 against teams with losing records and 0-8 against teams with winning records. On one hand, it's not good that they have not beaten the winning teams; on the other hand, many people did not expect them to beat even the losing teams.

Trend expected to continue: Matthew Boyd had a very good September (including the near no-hitter) and followed it up with a strong spring training and a good April. Here are his stats over his last nine starts:

Matthew Boyd: Putting it Together? (Stats Through April 22, 2018)

Period	G	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR	W-L	ERA	0 or 1 R
September 2017/April 18	9	56.0	39	16	15	15	41	6	1-4	2.41	7

The key stat in our mind is that in seven of the starts, he has allowed 0 or 1 run, including one run in each of his three starts this year. His strikeouts are a bit low for a pitcher these days, but he has gotten results. We're not saying he'll be Michael Fulmer II, but it looks like he is turning out to be a solid major league starter.

Funniest oddity: Victor Reyes is a swift outfielder taken in the Rule V draft from the Diamondbacks. Given his speed, and Victor Martinez's lack of same, it's not surprising that Reyes has pinch run for his fellow Victor. In fact, it has happened five times this year, all in the eighth or ninth innings, including three straight games from April 17-19. Mark Pattison wondered if that is a record. Whether it is or not, Hail to the Victors!

TOPS AT SHORTSTOP – By David Raglin

I think you have a pretty good idea who is the best Tigers shortstop in history. Hint: don't bother inviting him to an event on Sunday, July 29; he'll be a bit busy. We aren't going to write much here about Alan Trammell; there probably is not a lot about him that you don't already know.

However, he's far from the only good shortstop the Tigers have ever had. Who are some of the other top stops at short? Let's start by looking at the most games and runs created by Tiger shortstops.

All-Time Leaders Among Tiger Shortstops in Games and Runs Created*

Shortstop	Years	G	Shortstop	Years	RC
Alan Trammell	1977-1996	2,293	Alan Trammell	1976-1996	1,246
Donie Bush	1908-1921	1,872	Donie Bush	1908-1921	890
Billy Rogell	1930-1939	1,207	Harvey Kuenn	1952-1959	665
Harvey Kuenn	1952-1959	1,049	Billy Rogell	1930-1939	652
Charley O'Leary	1904-1912	833	Carlos Guillen	2004-2011	514
Ramon Santiago	2002-2016	818	Johnny Lipon	1942-1952	290
Carlos Guillen	2004-2011	817	Topper Rigney	1922-1925	273
Deivi Cruz	1997-2001	703	Deivi Cruz	1997-2001	253
Ed Brinkman	1971-1974	630	Ramon Santiago	2002-2016	239
Johnny Lipon	1942-1952	611	Charley O'Leary	1904-1912	235

* Includes all players whose primary position with Detroit was shortstop and includes their whole Tiger career (not just the seasons at shortstop).

It's no surprise that Tram is #1 in both games and runs created, but there is a clear #2 in both, Donie Bush (pronounced with a long "o".) Forgive yourself if you haven't heard of him; a century ago, his career was starting to wind down. However, in my mind, he was one of the most underrated Tigers in history. (I don't actually have a list of underrated Tigers, but if I did, Bush and Tommy Bridges would be at the top of it.)

Bush was one of those Forrest Gump guys who was in the middle of the game for decades. His real name was Owen and he was known as Ownie, but a typographical error gave him his baseball name Donie. He was a native of Indianapolis who joined the Tigers too late in the 1908 season to qualify for the World Series. He became the regular shortstop in 1909, the last of the Tigers' three straight pennant years. He played over 150 games nine years in a row and ten times overall.

Bush was a good offensive shortstop due to the large number of walks he received. He led the American League in bases on balls five of his first seven seasons as a regular (finishing tied for third and tied for second the other years). He was recognized as a very good ballplayer in his day; there was an MVP award each year from 1911 to 1914, with one writer from each league city voting. He received votes in three of the four years, finishing third one year, ahead of teammate Ty Cobb.

Bush was also considered a very good fielder, but Bill James later pointed out a curious flaw in his game: He was terrible at turning the double play. During Bush's tenure, the double play became more important and common and Bush never got the hang of it.

The Tigers let him go on waivers to the Senators late in the 1921 season due to a dispute with a coach and he finished his big-league career in 1923. He stayed in the game the rest of his life, managing the Senators, Pirates (to the 1927 pennant), White Sox and Reds, and Louisville and Minneapolis in the American Association. He famously managed Ted Williams in Minneapolis, who said about him, "I've been in the game for 36 years and nobody has any closer affection to my heart than Ownie."

Bush later served as president of his hometown Indianapolis Indians, and the stadium was renamed Bush Stadium in 1967 in his honor. There is a tradition that a King of Baseball is named at each Winter Meeting in honor of a person's service to the game, and Bush received that honor in 1967. He passed away in 1972.

Two more players deserve note. Billy Rogell is probably known most to Michigan baby boomers as a member of the Detroit City Council from 1942 to 1980 (minus two years in the 1940s), but he was a great player. He was a star on the powerhouse Tiger teams of the 1930s that won back-to-back pennants and the Tigers' first World Series championship. During his post-playing career, he was known for helping former players in need. He threw out the first pitch at the final game at Tiger Stadium in 1999 at the age of 94 and died four years later. At the time of Rogell's death, there was no major leaguer whose big-league started before his.

Harvey Kuenn was the American League Rookie of the Year in 1953. He made the All-Star team and received MVP votes in each of his seven seasons in Detroit as a regular. He played shortstop the first five of those years and center field the last two. He won the batting title in his last year in Detroit and was traded to Cleveland for Rocky Colavito, the home run champion, right before the 1960 season. He only played one year in Cleveland before finishing his career with the Giants, Cubs and Phillies. He later managed his hometown Milwaukee Brewers to their first American League pennant in 1982.

It's interesting that Ramon Santiago is sixth in games. He was not a great player by any means but he was a solid reserve for many years who contributed what he could. The Tigers during this century have a tradition of infield reserves staying with the team for years (Don Kelly, Andrew Romine), and Santiago was the king of that. It was nice to see Carlos Guillen on the list; he was such a key player for the teams until injuries took their toll. Deivi Cruz in eighth place on both lists, which shows how much the standards of the Tigers slipped before the Dombrowski era. Topper Rigney was only a regular for three years and only hit nine home runs over four seasons for the Tigers, but he had one of the oddest seasons every: in 1924, he hit four homers, drove in 94 runs, walked 102 times, and struck out 39 times. You won't see numbers like that these days!

2018 ERIE SEASOLVES, GETTING TO KNOW ALL ABOUT THEM – By Mark Pattison

With the Tigers' fortunes in a state of flux, looking at the minor-league options isn't just fun but now is a source of speculation because we might see these players a lot sooner than we would, say, five years ago. I kept that in mind as I watched the AA Erie SeaWolves of the Eastern League drop a three-game series to the Bowie Baysox in the first week of the Eastern League season. All of the games were one-run, last-at-bat losses, including one in so-called extra innings (can you tell I hate the new runner-on-second rule?).

So early in the season, it's foolish to say who's ahead of the pack, but more pitchers are ahead of more hitters. Erie had 13 hurlers on its 25-man roster, and Bowie had 14! Starter Tyler Alexander, whom we've seen

pitch for Erie before, held Bowie at bay in the series opener, giving up two runs and striking out five in 5.2 innings. Reliever Adam Ravenelle pitched scoreless ball the next 3.2 innings, setting up extra innings. The next night, lefty knuckleballer Josh Turley was effectively wild, walking two and fanning four in five innings in his first start of the season. He made Mark Trumbo, in Bowie on a rehab assignment, look foolish in a first-inning swinging strikeout. Turley barely scraped 70 mph with his knuckler; he got into trouble when he coughed up a three-run homer in the fifth inning on his 83-mph “heater.” In the series finale, Sandy Baez -- who had whiffed 10 in 4.2 innings in his first start -- looked as if he was trying to strike everyone out again, although he just fanned three in five innings. Jeff Thompson looked solid in relief of Baez, while Kyle Dowdy took a hard-luck loss relieving Turley when the only hit he gave up in 3.2 innings turned out to be the game-winner in the bottom of the ninth.

The Seawolves’ bats were mimicking the Tigers’ as Detroit was losing to Cleveland each night of the Erie-Bowie series in weather even colder than Bowie (45, 52 and 56 degrees for 6:35 p.m. first pitches). Shortstop Sergio Alcantara, acquired by Detroit in the J.D. Martinez trade, hit well, with three RBIs in the middle game, but he committed two errors on easy grounders and botched another ground ball that he recovered in time to make a play. But Erie didn’t have any backup infielders, because Will Maddox joined the disabled list after going down with a groin strain early in the series lid-lifter. First baseman Dominic Ficociello, a Society favorite from last year’s spring training trip, is making clutch hits, but he too let a grounder skitter off his glove in the same game. Catcher Jake Rogers, who came to Detroit in the Justin Verlander trade, isn’t wowing anybody with his bat, but he threw out would-be base stealers in each game; still, he was charged with a passed ball during another Bowie rally in the bottom of the ninth of the series finale. Outfielder Troy Montgomery looked anemic at the plate in one game, but fared better in the finale, and showed good range on defense.

It’s the only look at Erie from where I sit until after the All-Star break. By then, there could be some roster volatility with the SeaWolves, the Toledo Mud Hens, and the Tigers themselves.

DETROIT TIGERS BOOKS FOR SALE – By Mark Pattison

I unearthed duplicate copies of Detroit Tigers yearbooks, programs and the like published by the club, and I’m holding a blind auction to sell all titles to the lucky high bidder. The titles follow. Most are in pretty good shape considering their vintage.

1969 Yearbook; 1977 scorebook and official program; 1979 scorebook and official program; 1980 scorebook and official program; 1984 ALCS official scorebook and program (one in a protected plastic sleeve); 1985 yearbook; 1987 official spring training program; 1994 official spring training souvenir program; 1998 media guide; Comerica Park Update newsletter, August 1999; Comerica Park Opening Day program, April 11, 2000; 2006 ALCS program (folded pages); 2008 official spring training program (curled pages); 2008 yearbook; and a 2010 yearbook.

To enter the blind auction, mail the price you're willing to pay for the book collection, along with your phone and email. Send your bid to Mark Pattison, 1221 Floral St. NW, Washington, DC 20012. All auction entries must be received by May 15, 2018. The high bidder will be notified very shortly thereafter.

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For **Detroit Tigers 1984: What a Start! What a Finish!** (\$20) and
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authors David Raglin and Mark Pattison, send to:

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