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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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BUILDING THE LEGACY OF MIGUEL CABRERA – By David Raglin

On Saturday, May 16, Miguel hit his historic 400th home run. As well as hitting the milestone mark, it put him past two great hitters: Andres Galarraga, who had held the record for home runs by a Venezuelan, and Tiger Hall of Famer Al Kaline. It was a special home run for Cabrera, who said afterward, “It means a lot to me. I never expected to hit 400 home runs in the big leagues. I never expected any numbers. I just wanted to play and win games.”

This is probably a good time to start to consider Cabrera’s place in history among the all-time greats in the game. Let’s start by looking at the 32-year-old’s career offensive stats:

Miguel Cabrera’s Career Hitting Statistics, Through May 17, 2015

Year	Tm	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
2003	FLA	87	314	39	84	21	3	12	62	25	84	.268	.325	.468	.793	44	4.7
2004	FLA	160	603	101	177	31	1	33	112	68	148	.294	.366	.512	.879	112	6.6
2005	FLA	158	613	106	198	43	2	33	116	64	125	.323	.385	.561	.947	129	7.8
2006	FLA	158	576	112	195	50	2	26	114	86	108	.339	.430	.568	.998	139	9.1
2007	FLA	157	588	91	188	38	2	34	119	79	127	.320	.401	.565	.965	132	8.3
2008	DET	160	616	85	180	36	2	37	127	56	126	.292	.349	.537	.887	114	6.6
2009	DET	160	611	96	198	34	0	34	103	68	107	.324	.396	.547	.942	127	7.7
2010	DET	150	548	111	180	45	1	38	126	89	95	.328	.420	.622	1.042	141	9.5
2011	DET	161	572	111	197	48	0	30	105	108	89	.344	.448	.586	1.033	149	9.9
2012	DET	161	622	109	205	40	0	44	139	66	98	.330	.393	.606	.999	139	8.2
2013	DET	148	555	103	193	26	1	44	137	90	94	.348	.442	.636	1.078	155	10.9
2014	DET	159	611	101	191	52	1	25	109	60	117	.313	.371	.524	.895	115	6.8
2015	DET	38	138	23	46	7	0	10	30	25	27	.333	.436	.601	1.038	35	9.3
Total (13 yrs)		1857	6967	1188	2232	471	15	400	1399	884	1345	0.320	.397	.565	.962	1531	8.1

Cabrera came up during the 2003 season as a 20-year-old, and immediately played a key role on a Florida Marlins team that won the 2003 World Series. He put up highly consistent numbers for the Marlins in his five seasons before his trade to the Tigers. While we were excited to get Cabrera, I know that I at least had some concern about the prospects the Tigers gave up in the deal. However, Cameron Maybin has turned out to be a marginal regular and Andrew Miller is only now a relief ace after taking seven seasons to find himself.

While the Tigers had a disappointing 2008 season, Cabrera produced as expected at the plate. His defense at third base caused the Tigers to move Cabrera to first early in the 2008 season.

A key moment in Cabrera’s career took place in 2009, when he stayed out all night the day before a key game during the last weekend of the season. Cabrera later admitted he had a drinking problem and got help, for which he deserves a lot of credit. Except for a drunk driving situation in the spring of 2011, he has reportedly been clean since. I believe he has been clean because you can see it in the stats. Notice how much better Cabrera has been from 2010 on. He has had over nine runs created per game in four of the last six seasons (counting 2015). The two years he did not, one year he won the Triple Crown and the other year, he played with a crippling injury to his ankle and foot. To boot, his increase in offense came at a time where offense has been

drastically falling from about 4.6-4.9 runs per game in 2009 and before to about 4.1-4.4 runs per game this decade.

In this decade, Cabrera as won a Triple Crown, two consecutive MVP awards, finished second in the MVP race once, and finished in the top 10 in the MVP race every year. Before the 2012 season, the Tigers acquired Prince Fielder, so Miggy offered to move back to third base. Those of us who remembered the disastrous 2008 experiment cringed, but Cabrera was determined to make it work. While he was not a good third baseman by any stretch of the imagination, he held his own very well over there, which became doubly important in 2013 when Victor Martinez came back from his 2012 injury, closing off the DH option.

Cabrera battled injuries during the second half of the 2013 season and for the whole 2014 campaign, but still produced. Despite bone spurs in his his right ankle and a stress fracture in his foot, he hit .379 with 8 home runs the last month of the season, leading the Tigers to their fourth straight AL Central Division championship. He has recovered very well from the surgery and has been one of the best hitters in baseball this season.

Where does he stand among other hitters all-time so far in his career? Last season, Cabrera was 31 years old. Through the end of last season, among all players through their age 31 season (with the age based on the player's age as of June 30), Cabrera ranked eighth in hits, sixth in total bases, second in doubles, 10th in home runs, fifth in RBIs, ninth in runs created (RC), and tied for fifth in extra base hits with a guy you might have heard of, Hank Aaron. In fact, Cabrera's career stats look at lot like Aaron's at the same point in their careers. Both were born early in the year (Aaron in February and Cabrera in April) and both came up at the age of 20. Here are Cabrera's career stats and Aaron's at a comparable point (after his team's 38th game during his age 32 season):

Miguel Cabrera's Career Compared to Hank Aaron's, Through May 17, 2015, for Cabrera

Year	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
Cabrera	1857	6967	1188	2232	471	15	400	1399	884	1345	.320	.397	.565	.962	1531	8.1
Aaron	1844	7224	1320	2305	399	80	413	1336	680	757	.319	.378	.568	.946	1550	8.0

Wow! You can't get much closer than this. This is like when we did the comparison between Sweet Lou and Tram a couple of months ago, but even closer. To be fair, Aaron put up his stats in a much more pitcher-friendly era, which is why his offensive WAR is much higher than Cabrera's (88.4 versus 61.4). The biggest differences are mostly a product of the era they played. Cabrera has struck out much more than Aaron, but he has walked more. Aaron had more speed, as the 80 triples show. But the difference in runs created is only 19 run created. (Of course, we have to be careful when we do such comparisons to Aaron. His age 32 season was his first in Atlanta, in a much better hitting ballpark, and he had one of the greatest stretch runs of a career in history. This comparison does not mean we think Cabrera's career numbers will be as good as Aaron's, but as you will see, that doesn't mean they won't be great.)

That's where Miggy stands now. What does the future hold for Cabrera? He is at the point where he is starting to move up the all-time rankings in several categories. To help answer that question, I looked at Baseball Prospectus' projections for the rest of Cabrera's career. They do the projections year-by-year, but I'm not going to show you those. I think they drastically underestimate what Miggy will do the next few years, but overestimate what he will be doing in the next decade. Overall, though, I think the projections for the total of the rest of his career are reasonable. Here's what the stats project to be:

Miguel Cabrera's Projected Career Stats and Ranking Among MLB Players

Period	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
So Far ('03-'15)	1857	6967	1188	2232	471	15	400	1399	884	1345	.320	.397	.565	.962	1531	8.1
Future ('15-'24)	1395	5237	833	1497	297	9	230	825	637	1029	.286	.363	.478	.841	909	6.2
Career ('03-'24)	3252	12204	2021	3729	768	24	630	2224	1521	2374	.306	.383	.527	.910	2461	7.4
MLB Rank	4th	3rd	8th	4th	2nd	----	T6th	2nd	16th	4th	145th	T154th	T48th	54th	6th	unk

Yes, it's time for another wow. When Miggy hangs them up in 2024 (just about the time I'll be retiring, too!), they project Miguel Cabrera will have hit 630 home runs, which as of now would be tied for sixth best in history with Ken Griffey Jr. His 2,224 RBIs would be second of all time behind the aforementioned Aaron and 10 ahead of Babe Ruth. He would have 3,729 hits, trailing only Pete Rose, Ty Cobb, and that Aaron guy again, and ahead of Stan the Man Musial. These numbers suggest that Cabrera will not only go down in history as a great player, but as one of the top all-time best players in the history of major league baseball.

Last year, Cabrera signed an eight-year extension of his contract, which will take effect next year. It was pretty controversial because it guaranteed him \$30 million a year for his age 33 through age 40 seasons (2016-23), plus options for 2024 and 2025. It was a huge contract being given to a player who at the time would not even be a free agent for almost two years. Yes, I agree it was a ton of money, and I do not expect Cabrera to be worth \$32 million a year in 2022 and 2023 a year (no matter what inflation we see in baseball).

However, I was glad when I heard the news about the contract and am still glad. I don't care what else I am doing, when Miggy comes up to the plate, I stop what I am doing to watch him hit. I want to be able to watch Miguel Cabrera reach these milestones in a Tigers uniform, to go to Cooperstown in about 15 years to see him inducted with a plaque that has him wearing a Tiger hat. I love winning, and that contract may financially hold back other moves the Tigers will be able to make, but this is a rare opportunity to watch one of the all-time greats. Also, if the Baseball Prospectus projections are right, he will still be a decent player pretty much to the end.

I'm also glad they signed Miggy because, frankly, he has become my favorite player. I admire the way he dealt with his alcohol problem. I like how he gladly accepted the challenge to play third base after the Fielder signing and how he worked to make himself the best third baseman he could be. I am amazed that he could play, and play so well, on a seriously injured ankle last fall. That showed serious guts. I like the fact that he is not just a slugger, but a great hitter, and a very smart ballplayer. On the day he hit his 400th home run, the play his teammates mentioned after the game was a play in the field. Cabrera caught a foul popup by the first base stands, and immediately threw a bullet to third base to nail pinch-runner Pete Kozma, who had tagged up from second. David Price's reaction was, "He is hands-down the smartest player in baseball."

I got a chance to meet Miggy once, when the Society gave him his King Tiger award in spring training in 2013. The players get a lot of awards like this and most are very polite but nothing more when we give them the plaque, which we understand and are fine with. To contrast, Miggy seemed very happy to win the award. He was chatting with us as we walked down the first base line for the ceremony. He was happy to pose for as many pictures as we wanted, making sure we were satisfied, and then afterward, had a couple of his teammates come out of the dugout with him to pose with the plaque. I understand what Brad Ausmus meant when he said that Miggy was like a 260-pound kid who just likes to play baseball.

(Here is a little home run trivia: Miggy has hit 400 home runs in his career. Name the two players who played with the Tigers who have more career home runs (not necessarily with the Tigers—in fact the #1 player only hit 9 home runs with Detroit.) As a bonus, try to name the rest of the top 10 career home run hitters who have played with the Tigers, and the Tiger broadcaster who has the most career home runs. The answer is at the end of the Short Stripes on the next page.)

SHORT STRIPES – By Mark Pattison and David Raglin

If you're heading to the Annual Gathering June 13 in Detroit, be prepared to open your wallet for a couple of new books on the Tigers. Charles Lehrsens will speak after Tigers great Alan Trammell; he's just written "Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty." Also, Society member Scott Ferkovich will be on hand with copies of "Detroit the Invincible," a bio-book on the Tigers' first World Series winner from 1935; it's the 80th anniversary of that team this year.

Speaking of books, the second book by your trusty *Tigers Stripes* team, Mark Pattison and David Raglin, "Sock It to 'Em Tigers," a bio-book on the 1968 squad, is on Detroit Athletic Company blog editor Dan Holmes' list of the 12 Detroit sports books you've just gotta read. And who are we to disagree? Amazon now has used copies available in the low \$20s, so scoop one up now while you can! Other baseball titles on the list: Richard Bak's "Cobb Would Have Caught It," Tom Stanton's "The Final Season," Charles Alexander's "Ty

Cobb,” Hank Greenberg’s “The Story of My Life,” Doug Wilson’s “The Bird: The Life and Legacy of Mark Fidrych,” Elden Auker’s “Sleeper Cars and Flannel Uniforms,” and Lawrence Ritter’s “The Glory of Their Times,” which includes revealing interviews with Sam Crawford and Davy Jones.

Book Report, Part 3: Remember Glenn Wilson, who was shipped to Philadelphia in the Willie Hernandez deal in the spring of 1984? It turns out he’s written a memoir, “Headed Home,” a slim (155 pages) volume in which he lays out his pride and his ego. He tells of how he ticked off everyone from Sparky Anderson to Jim Leyland and a lot of folks in between (he can only ask for forgiveness from them through the pages of this book), tells some searing stories about growing up and later being addicted to painkillers, and how – a surprise to even himself – he joined the ordained ministry after all that. Published in 2012 by Lucid Books, it too is available only online (\$14.95) these days. FYI: Wilson doesn’t get traded to Philly until about page 40.

The Tigers bullpen has been much maligned, at times by us, so we were glad to read (and a bit surprised) to read that through May 17, the Tigers bullpen had the best ERA for the month of May at 1.38. Yes, it’s only two and a half weeks, but we’ll take it. By the way, thanks to Gary Fitzpatrick for posting that stat from Fox’s Ken Rosenthal on the Mayo Smith Society Facebook page. If you want to join our Facebook community, request to join our group and I or Mark will add you.

Are you tired of the Michigan winters and are looking for a home in a sunnier climate with a baseball theme? Former Tiger Damion Easley is selling his house in Glendale, Ariz., a Phoenix suburb, for a cool \$5.5 million, according to the Detroit News. The house has 15,000 square feet of space, and features a bedroom adorned with a scoreboard, along with a room with a wall covered with a picture of the field at Tiger Stadium, an indoor batting cage, and a miniature outdoor diamond, Even some of the eight-and-a-half bathrooms has a baseball theme, with shower tiles that form baseball diamonds.

Last month, we wrote about how well Shane Greene was pitching. We were worried we might have a *Tigers Stripes* curse like the *Sports Illustrated* cover jinx, but Greene has pitched much better his last two starts. We also have written glowingly about J.D. Martinez, who later struggled through a big slump this season. What that tells us is that it is not like the players find it and all is happy ever after. Part of it is that other players adjust to their changes. Part of it, though, is that it is hard to make changes like this and not ever revert back to old habits. Martinez talked about how even when he was belting the ball in spring training and the early days of the season, things were not right. Martinez then went through the slump, but he seems to be righting himself lately, which is good news for us Tigers fans.

(Home run trivia answer: #1, Eddie Mathews, 512 career home runs (9 with Detroit); #2, Darrell Evans, 414 (141); #3, Miguel Cabrera, 400 (262), #4, Al Kaline, 399 (399); #5, Frank Howard, 382 (13); #6, Norm Cash, 377 (373); #7 Rocky Colavito, 374 (139); #8, Luis Gonzalez, 354 (23); #9, Torii Hunter, 337 (34); and #10, Hank Greenberg, 331 (306). The broadcaster was Mel Ott, who was on the radio for the Tigers in the 1950s and hit 511 home runs for the New York Giants. A couple of other trivia facts for you: Mathews ended his career with the 1968 Tigers, one of only three Hall of Famers to end his career as a World Series champion; Joe DiMaggio in 1951 and Johnny Mize in 1953, both with the Yankees, are the others. Evans played for three teams and divided his home runs almost evenly: 142 for San Francisco, 141 for Detroit, and 131 for Atlanta.)

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