

Tigers Stripes

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Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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AT THE QUARTER-SEASON MARK – By David Raglin

Sparky Anderson used to say that he would wait until about 40 games had been played, about a quarter season, to assess what he had in a team. After finishing the Tampa Bay series May 22, the Tigers are 43 games into the 2016 and are one game under .500 at 21-22.

Certainly, the successes and failures of this team are as mixed as their record. Some players have been spectacular: Jordan Zimmermann, Ian Kinsler, Nick Castellanos, Victor Martinez, Francisco Rodriguez and, especially recently, Miguel Cabrera and Cameron Maybin (AL co-players of the week for the week ending May 22). On the minus side there are Justin Upton, Anthony Gose, James McCann, Anibal Sanchez, Mike Pelfrey and Drew VerHagen (Gose and VerHagen have been sent to Toledo). Their streaks this season have been, in order, 7-3, 2-7, 5-0, 1-11, and 5-1. Why the streakiness? They have feasted on bad teams, and struggled against good ones, going 13-5 against teams with losing records but only 8-17 against teams with winning records:

Detroit Tigers Record By Opponent's Current Record, 2016

Opponent With Losing Record	W	L	Opponent With Winning Record	W	L
Houston	1	2	Baltimore	1	3
Minnesota	6	0	Cleveland	0	6
NY Yankees	1	1	Kansas City	1	2
Oakland	3	1	Miami	2	0
Tampa Bay	2	1	Pittsburgh	3	1
			Texas	0	3
			Washington	1	2
Total	13	5	Total	8	17

We are not going to focus on the problems in the rotation, the streakiness of the offense or the good things like Ian Kinsler and Jordan Zimmermann, for that matter. Instead, *Tigers Stripes* will give you, despite the glut of analysis in recent years, something you likely haven't seen anywhere else. Read on.

LEFTY-RIGHTY – By David Raglin

We spent a lot of time after the Justin Upton signing about the concern that the Tigers were going to be too right-handed at the plate. It looked like switch-hitter Victor Martinez would be the only left-handed hitter in the everyday lineup. Tigers General Manager Al Avila was asked about that at Upton's press conference, and his response was something to the effect that good hitters can take care of a problem like that, which did make sense. But, even Avila probably did not expect what we've seen so far:

Detroit Tigers Against Left-Handed and Right-Handed Pitchers, 2016

Opp Pitcher	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
Left-Handed	331	39	78	10	0	11	37	34	82	.236	.306	.366	.672	37	3.8
Right-Handed	1153	159	316	58	8	45	154	86	294	.274	.328	.455	.783	171	5.3

Yes, those numbers are right. The Tigers are hitting well against right-handed pitchers but struggling against lefties. The league average is about 4.3 runs per game, so the Tigers against right-handed pitchers are well above average (only one team, Boston has scored more than 5.3 runs per game), and well-below average

against the pitchers they have the platoon advantage against (only one team, Minnesota, has scored less than 3.8 runs per game).

Why is that? Let’s look at the left-handed starters the Tigers have faced:

Left-Handed Starters Facing the Detroit Tigers, 2016

Gm	LH Starter	Team	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR	D	ERA
1	Wei-Yin Chen	Mia	5.0	9	5	5	0	3	1	(L)	9.00
4	CC Sabathia	NY	6.0	4	3	3	4	3	0	W	4.50
5	Jon Niese	Pit	6.0	5	4	3	1	5	2	W	4.50
9	Dallas Keuchel	Hou	8.0	5	0	0	1	4	0	W	0.00
19	Rich Hill	Oak	7.0	4	0	0	0	8	0	W	0.00
28	Cole Hamels	Tex	7.0	1	0	0	2	9	0	W	0.00
30	Martin Perez	Tex	6.0	2	2	2	5	7	0	(W)	3.00
42	Drew Smyly	TB	6.3	7	3	3	2	5	2	L	4.26
Total for 8 Starters.....			51.3	37	17	16	15	44	5	6-2	2.81

That’s a pretty good bunch of starters. Keuchel is the defending Cy Young winner, Hamels has been a Cy Young contender, Rich Hill has a 2.54 ERA after convincing teams after four starts last year that he was back, Chen was the Marlins' Opening Day starter, and we all know about Smyly. What we are seeing is that teams are not throwing their weak lefties against the Tigers, but they will throw their good ones. The Tigers have faced lefties in 22.9 percent of their starts, fifth lowest in the league and below the league average of 25.6.

The good news here is what Al Avila predicted. Looking at the numbers against right-handers, the good Tiger right-handed hitting lineup is hitting righties. We need to see that continue, but it looks like we don’t have to be concerned about that.

R.I.P., DICK MCAULIFFE – By David Raglin

We were very sad to lose another of our 1968 heroes recently when we heard of the passing of Dick McAuliffe. He played for the Tigers from 1960 to 1973, debuting at age 20 and coming up for good in 1961 at the age of 21. McAuliffe was known for many things: his batting stance, the low number of times he hit into double plays (and the famous time he did), his fight with Tommy John and his will to win, but what he should be most remembered for is that he was a very, very good ballplayer, and highly underrated.

Part of that was his skill set. He walked a lot—over 60 walks in eight seasons, and two more where he would have if it was not for injuries. He was in the top ten for walks in the American League four times (1964, 1967, 1968, and 1970). Unfortunately, at the time walks were not noticed; publications like the Sporting News magazine—the Bible of Baseball in its day—and Who’s Who in Baseball did not including hitter’s bases on balls, and it was well before Bill James and "Moneyball" showed how important it was to get on base. Therefore, nobody noticed what in an era where hitters got on base a bit over 30 percent of the time, McAuliffe had an on-base percentage over .350 five times, and twice was in the top ten in the league.

Unfortunately, he did not have a high batting average, made worse by playing in such a poor hitters’ era, and that was what people looked at those days. Thanks to his patience at the plate, he led the American League in runs scored in 1968 with 95. That is a very low total for a league leader, but it was the Year of the Pitcher, so the number does not look anywhere as impressive as it is.

In his *New Historical Baseball Abstract*, published in 2001, Bill James rated McAuliffe the 22nd best second baseman in history, ahead of Hall of Famers, Johnny Evers, Red Schoendienst and Bill Mazerowski, and just behind Hall of Famers Bobby Doerr and Tony Lazzeri. (Note as an aside that James had Lou Whitaker 13th on the list, the second-best non-Hall of Famer on the list behind Bobby Grich.).

In that book, James described McAuliffe’s unique batting stance this way: "[H]e tucked his right wrist under his chin and held his bat over his head, so it looked as if he were dodging the sword of Damocles in mid-

descent. He pointed his left knee at the catcher and his right knee at the pitcher and spread the two as far apart as humanly possible, his right foot balanced on the toes, so that to have lowered his heel two inches would have pulled his knee inward by a foot. He whipped the bat in a sort of violent pinwheel which produced line drives, strikeouts, and fly balls, few ground balls, and not a lot of pop outs."

McAuliffe developed that stance as a way to help him pull the ball. He would do anything to succeed on a ballfield. In 1969, he knee was in such bad shape that his wife had to help him out of bed in the morning, but he did not tell the team until it was unbearable; he ended up having to miss the second half of the season. Even at Tigers fantasy camps years later, McAuliffe played to win. He may have been quiet off the field, but on the field he was driven. Tommy John dared to throw three pitches up and in to McAuliffe on July 22, 1968, then mouthed off to him as McAuliffe walked to first. McAuliffe charged the mound in what became one of the most famous fights in Tigers history. John hurt his shoulder and was out for the year, and McAuliffe was suspended five games. Showing how valuable McAuliffe was, the Tigers lost four of the five games, all by one run, and saw their previously insurmountable lead drop to four games.

Dick McAuliffe was a very, very good player -- not a Hall of Famer, but not too far below it. He was a big part of one of the greatest eras in Tigers history, and we will miss him.

AN ALMOST LOST WEEK(END) WITH THE SMITHERS -- By Mark Pattison

It's not often that we Detroit expatriates living in the mid-Atlantic can get to see a week's worth of Tigers baseball in our own back yard. (In fact, the last time was before the expansion Washington Senators trundled off to Texas in 1972.) That's what made the prospect of seven games in seven days in Washington and Baltimore so appealing to Tigers fans.

Alas, much of the week was spent between states of distress and, well, galling. In those seven games came three instances of starters Anibal Sanchez and Mike Pelfrey tiring early and giving the bullpen the opportunity -- which they took with relish -- of letting the opposition blow the ballgame wide open. In another game, Justin Verlander pitched his heart out, surrendering only a solo home run in a game when the Tigers couldn't score.

All the above is true, but close to two dozen Society faithful were witnesses to history. Our first of two "Mayo Day" games on May 11 featured ex-Washington National Jordan Zimmermann toiling for the Tigers, with ex-Tiger Max Scherzer toeing the slab for the Nats. We secretly relished the prospect of a pitchers' duel, but nobody expected what was to take place: a record-tying 20-strikeout performance against Detroit by Scherzer. Some in our group hated to see it happen; others wanted to see Scherzer break the record. And it was possible; with two down in the ninth inning, the next hitters up were James McCann and Anthony Gose, both of whom were 0-for-3 against Scherzer with three whiffs. But McCann grounded into a force play to end the game, a 3-2 Washington win. Despite the 20 strikeouts (and zero walks -- which every 20-K pitcher has accomplished) and Max's 4-to-1 strike-to-ball ratio, the Tigers kept it close thanks to a solo home run by Jose Iglesias in the third inning and a leadoff ninth-inning homer by J.D. Martinez. And Detroit's own Victor Martinez, the only Tigers batter to not fan against Scherzer, stroked his third single of the game with one out in the ninth.

Fast-forward to May 14, the second of the two Mayo Day games, but this one in Baltimore against the Orioles. Unfortunately, this was one of those bullpen-breakdown games. But first came the magnificent home run by Miguel Cabrera, which landed atop of the roof of the visitors' bullpen dugout, which is behind and above the Baltimore bullpen just left of dead centerfield. They estimated the two-run blast's distance at 462 feet, and it gave Detroit a 2-0 lead in the top of the sixth inning. But Sanchez surrendered three runs in the bottom half of the frame, then a leadoff gopher ball in the seventh, at which point he was removed. Although the Tigers got one run back in the top of the eighth, the Orioles countered with five in the bottom of the eighth for a final score of 9-3, making for Detroit's 11th loss in its last 12 games.

But, true to the Society's slogan, "Tigers Fans Who Always Care," I shaved off my beard, put on a new Mayo Smith baseball cap, and dragged my wife and daughter to the series finale -- a sunny, windy day -- to change my luck for a game started by Michael Fulmer, who started the only win thus far on Detroit's Mid-Atlantic road trip (but which I couldn't see in person). He wasn't good enough to last five innings, but the bullpen parade kept Baltimore off the scoreboard. The umpires may have given J.D. Martinez a gift no-swing

call on a 2-2 pitch with two out in the eighth; on the next pitch, Martinez homered, followed by a first-pitch Cabrera round-tripper. Tigers win (finally!), and the victory goes to Australian call-up Warwick Saupold, whom I have dubbed The Wonder From Down Under. Oh, but it's great to be young and a Tigers fan!

SEAWOLVES REPORT, VOLUME 2 -- By Mark Pattison

Prior to the Tigers' Eastern Seaboard swing, their Double-A farm team, the Erie SeaWolves, played a three-game set in Bowie, Md., against Baltimore's AA club, the Baysox. Rain postponed one game, prompting a doubleheader the next day. Erie was suffering from Silent Bat Syndrome, scoring just one run in each of the seven-inning contests. But the SeaWolves took the series finale in convincing fashion, 13-6. Some impressions:

Erie mirrors its parent team in lusty hitting and inconsistent pitching. The SeaWolves were leading the Eastern League in team batting average, but were at the bottom of the 12-team circuit in team ERA. This results in a win-loss record that can't seem to get over. 500.

Dean Green, the 6'4", 255-pound first baseman-DH, is Erie's most consistent hitter. He hits for average and power, and collects some walks. But this is his third season in AA, and he's blocked more by Victor Martinez than Miguel Cabrera. Green looks terribly slow afield.

Jason Krizan, in center field, homered in consecutive games for the SeaWolves, but, like Green, is in his third season at Erie. Although he plays garbage time in some spring training games, it's tough to see a path to the majors in Detroit.

Jeff McVaney, in right field, is an exciting player, but not always in the right way. He can hit for average, and has a bit of pop in his bat. But in the 13-6 win, he committed errors in consecutive innings, the second of which -- a garden-variety single -- he let the ball roll all the way to the wall and enabled both runners and the batter to score.

The catching picture has improved. Austin Green may continue to be the regular, but he had throwing errors on stolen-base attempts on consecutive baserunners in one game. His offense has also tailed off since the start of the season. But Detroit claimed John Hicks from Minnesota on waivers, and he's given solid offense when given a chance to play.

JaCoby Jones was still under a 50-game suspension when Erie played because he had failed a drug test while playing in the Arizona Fall League. But if neither shortstop nor third base turn out to be his position, Jones can claim left field. Erie has carried only three outfielders all season, and when Conor Harrell went on the disabled list in early May, SeaWolves manager Lance Parrish had to resort to using infielders Corey Jones and Dominic Ficociello in left field. It's too bad Detroit doesn't give Christin Stewart a taste of Double-A. He's been whomping the ball in high-A Lakeland, crushing 13 homers in 40 games in a park tailored for big-leaguers.

On the pitching side of things, relievers Paul Voelker, their righty closer, and left Joe Mantipty seem like worthy candidates for advancement to AAA Toledo. But of the starters, Lucas Harrell, who's already done time in the majors and who's been to Toledo, is the only one with an ERA below 4.00. Unless this staff gets straightened out, it could be a long season in northwestern Pennsylvania.

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