

Tigers Stripes

The Newsletter of the

 Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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THE LEGEND CONTINUES TO GROW, CONTINUED – By David Raglin

We know we started last month with an article about Miguel Cabrera's greatness, but we can't avoid doing it again. We need to understand how great Miguel Cabrera is and how lucky we are to have him as a Tiger. We have had a lot of great players wearing the Old English D, players like Ty Cobb, Hank Greenberg, and Al Kaline, but it is not pushing the envelope to say that other than Cobb, Cabrera is the greatest Tiger of all time.

Let's start by how Cabrera is dominating the American League this season. Below is a table of 26 statistics, Cabrera's total, and his rank in the American League. Some of these stats are "modern" ones, so we have provided a glossary below. Stats where Cabrera is first or second are in bold. (So you don't have to count, he is first or second in 19 of the 26 stats.)

For those of you who are more in tune with the good old-fashioned stats, Cabrera is at the top or in second in many of those, too. His main competition in those races is Chris Davis, the Orioles' first baseman. Davis is a good player who was well-regarded as a prospect and is finally putting it together, but this is uncharted territory for him.

Miguel Cabrera and His Ranking Among American League Hitters, Through June 15, 2013

Stat	Cabrera	Rank	Stat	Cabrera	Rank	Stat	Cabrera	Rank	Stat	Cabrera	Rank
WAR	3.7	2nd	R	54	1st	3B	1	T39th	RC	73	1st
OWAR	4.3	1st	H	92	2nd	HR	18	T2nd	RC/G	11.0	2nd
BA	.354	1st	TB	164	2nd	RBI	69	1st	GIDP	10	7th
OBP	.448	1st	TOB	57	1st	SO	44	T60th	OWP	.831	2nd
SLG	.684	2nd	XBH	35	5th	BB	41	1st	WPA	2.7	2nd
OPS	1.078	2nd	1B	57	T7th	IBB	9	1st	SWPA	2.8	2nd
%GP	100%	T1st	2B	16	T20th	SB	2	T65th			

Glossary: WAR-Wins Above Replacement-Number of wins that player has provided above a "freely-available" player, OWAR-Offensive WAR-WAR for offense only (ignoring defense), OPS-OBP+SLG, %GP-% of Team Games Played, TB-Total Bases, TOB-Times on Base, XBH-Extra Base Hits, IBB-Intentional Bases on Balls, RC-Runs Created, RC/G-RC per 27 outs, OWP-Offensive Winning Percentage-Winning Percentage of a team with nine Cabreras at the plate and average defense and pitching, WPA-Win Probability Added, Number of wins added by a player at the plate based on the situation before and after the plate appearance, SWPA—WPA taking into account the situations the player gets to hit in.

How many players have had a better year the year after they have won the Triple Crown? Miguel Cabrera is having a much better year than he did last year. The first line is his 2013 stats, the second his 2013 stats projected to 161 games (what he played in 2012), and the third line is his 2012 stats:

Miguel Cabrera, 2013 Versus 2012, Through June 15, 2013

Year	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	RC	RC/G
2013	66	260	54	92	16	1	18	69	41	44	.354	.448	.631	73	11.0
2013 Proj	161	634	132	224	39	2	44	168	100	107	.354	.448	.631	178	11.0
2012	161	622	109	205	40	0	44	139	66	98	.330	.393	.606	139	8.2
Better in '13	-----	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Same	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

INNING-BY-INNING – By David Raglin

One thing we've done periodically over the 30 seasons we've been doing *Tigers Stripes* is to look at the Tigers' runs scored and allowed per inning. Sometimes, this provides some real insight into how the club is doing. Below is the number of runs scored and allowed per inning, and the number per nine innings, and below that is a grouping by inning:

Detroit Tigers Runs Scored and Allowed Per Inning, Through June 15, 2013

Inning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Total
Runs Scored	29	51	42	56	50	41	26	23	8	0	0	0	0	5	331
Runs Allowed	29	23	40	21	26	20	38	21	20	7	2	1	1	0	249
RS/9Inn	4.0	7.0	5.7	7.6	6.8	5.6	3.6	3.1	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.5	5.0
RA/9Inn	4.0	3.1	5.5	2.9	3.6	2.7	5.2	2.9	3.5	7.3	3.6	2.7	4.5	0.0	3.7

Inning	1-3	4-6	7-8	9-14	Total
Runs Scored	122	147	49	13	331
Runs Allowed	92	67	59	31	249

Inning	1-3	4-6	7-8	9-14	Total
RS/9Inn	5.5	6.7	3.3	1.7	5.0
RA/9Inn	4.2	3.0	4.0	4.1	3.7

There are several things worth noting. Let's start with the first inning. The Tigers have scored less runs in the first, a pace of 4.0 runs per game, than their overall average of 5.0 runs per game or the league average of 4.4 runs per game. That is surprising given that they have Miguel Cabrera up in every first inning, and if a man gets on base, they have Prince Fielder at the plate. Cabrera has done fine in the first, with a .450 batting average with power, and Torii Hunter has also hit well. However, Fielder has only hit .244/.319/.366 (BA/OBP/SLG), Victor Martinez at .250/.240/.292, and Andy Dirks /162/.162/.189.

The funny thing is that they have done much better in the second, an inning where Cabrera rarely hits (only nine plate appearances). The stars in the second have been, not surprisingly, Jhonny Peralta and Prince Fielder, but also Alex Avila (.250/.387/.500, and Omar Infante (.367/.400/.484). We would guess that this is a bit of random noise, and they should eventually do better in the first and not as well in the second as the season goes on.

In the middle innings, the Tigers are scoring a lot of runs and allowing very few (looking at the runs scored and allowed per nine innings). That is probably a combination of the Tigers' strong starting pitching and their offense beating up on the other team's starters the second and third time through the order.

The most interesting thing to note is the lack of offense late in the game. Much has appropriately been said about the Tigers' bullpen problems and the search for a closer who can be depended upon. They have been winning after seven innings 43 times but have only won 34 of those games. While a 34-9 record may not sound bad, that means they've lost the lead 21 percent of the time, compared to the league average of 15 percent. The Tigers have lost a ninth-inning lead four times but have overcome a ninth inning deficit only once, and they are 2-7 in extra inning games. Their runs allowed per nine innings for the seventh and eighth innings, and for the ninth inning on are better than the league average, but the offense has only scored 3.3 runs per nine innings in the seventh and eighth, and a paltry 1.7 runs per nine innings in the ninth inning on.

Part of the problem is that teams are pitching around Miguel Cabrera in those situations. In late and close situations (in the 7th or later with the batting team tied, ahead by one, or the tying run at least on deck), Cabrera is hitting only .135 (5-for-37) with 11 walks, which suggests they are giving him slop and he is swinging at more of it than he would like. The only Tigers hitter who is approaching his season stats in those situations is Omar Infante; everyone else is well below what they do in other situations.

The good news is that, again, this tends to even out over time. In 2012, they won over 90 percent of the games when they were leading after seven innings. Our guess is that while they still need to take care of the bullpen problem, Detroit's hitters will start to pick it up late in the game in key situations, and they will start to win more of those games.

THOSE 0-0 GAMES – By David Raglin

If it seems like the Tigers have been going through one of those stretches where they have been wasting some good pitching, you would be right. In one week, they had three games that were scoreless through eight innings and lost them all: Tuesday, May 28, and Thursday, May 30, both 1-0 to the Pirates in 11 innings, and 3-0 to Tampa Bay on Wednesday, June 5, on three runs in the bottom of the ninth. Given their strong offense, it is not surprising that they have had the third fewest games where they have scored three or less runs (25, with only Baltimore and Los Angeles at 23 with fewer). While we do not expect to do well in low-scoring games, the Tigers have especially struggled at 3-22, a .120 winning percentage. That is the lowest in the American League, just ahead of the Angels at 3-20. To compare, the league winning percentage when a team scores three runs or fewer is .220, which is right about where they were in 2012 (14-49, .222). We expect that to change and the Tiger will start winning more of those close low-scoring games.

CATCHING UP WITH SOME OF OUR FAVORITES – By Todd Miller

During the Tigers' visit to Pittsburgh the last week of May, I spoke with some current Tigers, and a couple of ex-Bengals now playing for the Bucs, before the third game, a 5-3 Pirates victory in PNC Park.

To Prince Fielder, PNC Park is like a second home due to the dozens of games he played there when he was with the Brewers. "The routine [preparing for a game] feels the same as it always has," said Prince. "I've always enjoyed playing here, and it's good to be back." Prince may not have been feeling that way at the end of the two-game set in Pittsburgh, in which he went 2-for-9 – a far cry from the numbers he used to generate against Pirates pitching.

After batting practice, I assisted first base coach Rafael Belliard with picking up baseball cards fans were tossing over the dugout roof for the ex-Pirates utility infielder (1982-90) to autograph and asked him what it was like to play and coach for Jim Leyland. "It's the same," said Raffie, a native of the Dominican Republic who lives in South Florida during the offseason. "There's a lot of baseball in that guy, and there's always something new to learn."

After leaving the Pirates through free agency, Raffie spent eight seasons with the Braves playing for Bobby Cox and was a member of the 1995 World Series championship team. "I was very fortunate to play for two of the best managers in the game," said Raffie. "Jim talked to you a lot and was very aggressive in games because we didn't always have good pitching. Bobby was laid back and didn't say much. Because we had great pitching, he used to let the game come to him." As to whether Leyland has mellowed after more than 20 years as a big league manager, Raffie said, "No way. He still wants to win as much as ever."

The Tigers skipper was in low spirits after his club had dropped its second consecutive game. Not wanting to dwell on the events of the previous nine innings, I asked Jim whether his son, Patrick, playing in Lakeland for the Tigers' Florida State League (High-A) affiliate, brought back memories of when he played and managed there in the 1960s and 70s. "He's down there, but I don't get sentimental about stuff like that," Jim replied. "That's just what we do."

The pair of games in Pittsburgh was a homecoming for Don Kelly, a Steel City native who lives in the area during the offseason, and who began his major league career with the Pirates in 2007. Don's wife, Carrie, is the sister of Neil Walker, the Pirates' second baseman. Carrie and Neil's father is ex-Tigers pitcher Tom Walker, who played at The Corner during the 1975 season, and for several other teams from 1972 to 1977. "It's always fun to play in front of family and friends," said Don. "After the Monday game [Memorial Day afternoon at Comerica Park], I spent some time with Neil and my in-laws that evening, and that was really enjoyable." Don met Carrie at a women's college basketball game in which his wife was playing for Wagner College in Staten Island, N.Y., and his sister was on the opposing Quinnipiac University (Conn.) team.

Following the game, I asked Brandon Inge how he's adjusting to a new team and a new league after the Oakland A's chose to let him become a free agent after last season. "It's going fine," said Brandon. "I like my teammates and the atmosphere over here is nice." As for whether he was disappointed that the A's didn't offer him a contract, Brandon replied matter-of-factly, "It was all about the dollars, and I didn't take anything personally. You can't in this game. You just have to keep things in perspective." During the Pirates' trip to

Detroit, Brandon took a break from the daily grind and spent time with his family in Saline, where he saw a Little League game in which one of his sons played.

After recording his 22nd save in as many tries, Pirates closer Jason Grilli, a Royal Oak native who played for the Tigers 2005-08, insisted that he has no hard feelings toward the Tigers organization and Jim Leyland. “I have great, fond memories of my time in Detroit,” said Jason, whom the Pirates signed as a free agent out of the Phillies organization in the middle of the 2011 season. “I came into my own as a pitcher and got to play in a World Series for the team in my home state. That other stuff [an alleged feud with the manager] gets blown way out proportion. I don’t know where people come up with it.” Jason’s father, Steve, pitched for the Tigers from 1975 to 1977.

As the season advances, it will be interesting to see if the Tigers’ 1-3 record in their Rivalry Week series will have a bearing on their postseason fortunes. In 2009, losing two of three in Pittsburgh to an inferior Pirates team that finished 62-99 arguably led to an extra-innings lost in “Game 163” in Minnesota for the division title, and no postseason playoff berth. Four years later, losing a pair of 1-0 games to an improved Bucco squad that has trouble scoring runs is not how anyone could have envisioned the series would go.

As ex-catcher and broadcaster Joe Garagiola said in the title of his long-ago book, baseball is a funny game.

1935 TIGERS BOOK

It is with great pleasure that we announce that the 1935 Detroit Tigers will be the subject of their own book. The ’35 Tigers, of course, were the first team from the Motor City to win a World Series (after four previous tries). They featured four future Hall-of-Famers in their lineup (Mickey Cochrane, Hank Greenberg, Charlie Gehringer and Goose Goslin), and a pitching staff with such stalwarts as General Crowder, Schoolboy Rowe, Elden Auker and Tommy Bridges. They squared off against the Chicago Cubs in the Series, prevailing four games to two. Certainly such a team is worthy of its own book, one that is long overdue, and promises to be an excellent read.

The book project is being directed under the auspices of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR). Like previously-published team books on the ’68 and ’84 Tigers, this one will include biographies of every Tigers player from the 1935 season. In addition, there will be several feature stories, such as “The 1935 Season in Review,” “The Motor City in 1935,” “The Corner of Michigan and Trumbull,” and “Detroit: The City of Champions,” just to name a few. The book’s editor is Mayo Smith Society member Scott Ferkovich, a lifelong Tigers fan from Detroit. Scott is also a member of SABR.

It is only fitting that this book project should have significant contributions from the Mayo Smith Society. For members who would like to get involved, there are still writing and editing opportunities. Several players are available for those interested in writing biographies. We are also in need of fact-checkers, a very crucial part of any historical book. Anybody interested in jumping on board this exciting project should contact Scott at scottferk@gmail.com.

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Tigers Stripes, the official newsletter of the Mayo Smith Society, is published nine times a year. **Publisher/Society Administrator:** Todd Miller (412/848-1082, toddprmtg@verizon.net). **Editor:** Mark Pattison (202/829-9289, pattison_mark@hotmail.com). **Writer/ Sabermetrician:** David Raglin (703/556-0332 or 703/835-1198, darags@ymail.com). **Membership Services Coordinator:** Pete Wright. The Mayo Smith Society was established in 1983 by Dale Petroskey, Dennis Petroskey, and Bill Mackay.