

# Tigers Stripes

The Newsletter of the



Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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## AN AFTERNOON WITH AL KALINE – By Mark Pattison

Mr. Tiger himself, Al Kaline, was the star attraction at the Society's 30th Annual Gathering June 14 at the Hockeytown Café across the street from Comerica Park. Not only were the Society's tickets to the 12-9 thumping of Minnesota later that day all sold out, but so too were all available spaces in the Hockeytown Café's Celebration Room – the Society's first such twin killing in the Comerica Park era. Kaline reminisced, "There was a lot of times I did a speaking engagement for \$50." Well, we can tell you he gets more these days, but since we've already paid for it, we're going to use this space to share just a bit of the wit and wisdom of Al Kaline.

On haggling with scouts in the pre-draft era: "My dad, in asking questions to Ed Katalinas, our scout, he said, 'Well, who's your best minor league outfielder?' And Ed Katalinas said, 'Well, we have a fellow in Buffalo (at that time) named Bill Tuttle,' and my dad said, 'What'd he hit?' 'He hit .280.' 'Oh! My son can hit .280!' I said, 'Wait a minute, Dad! You're talking about the big leagues, we're not talking about high school or something like that.' But that was my father."

On working for a living: "When my mom and dad were both working and I asked my mother, I says, 'Do you want me to get a paper route?' Try to earn a little income. She said, 'No. You go out and enjoy yourself, because you'll have to work the rest of your life.' So in my speech in Cooperstown, I says, 'Mom, you were wrong. I played, I played baseball for the rest of my life. I didn't work. I played.'"

On winning the World Series: "For one year after becoming world champions, you can say, 'We were the best.' And you never forget that. ... Not every player can get a chance to do that. So I was able to one time and it was a great, great feeling."

On Mayo Smith, the Society's namesake: "Mayo let us, let us play. He really did. He was not a guy who tried to overmanage too much, although he did. But he managed the way you're supposed to. He wasn't one of those kind of guys that – I'll throw in a name like Charley Dressen, who thought he was the greatest mind in all of baseball. But I tell you one thing. Probably the greatest thing and most daring thing that ever happened in the world of baseball, in the World Series particularly, when he moved Mickey Stanley to shortstop."

On batting against Nolan Ryan: "I faced Nolan Ryan when I was 39 years old. And I had lost a little bit of my courage when that guy threw a 97-mile-an-hour fastball at my head."

On the Tigers' June swoon: "We have guys who are going to be free agents at the end of the year. They want to have big years. So maybe they're putting a lot of pressure on themselves: 'I gotta do good, I gotta do.' And when you play the game when you gotta do something instead of relaxing and just letting it flow, sometimes your mind can do a terrible thing."

On playing for Billy Martin: "You mean Jekyll and Hyde? (laughter) Billy was a great manager. He knew how to play the game, and what to do, but Billy was a guy that would just go off for whatever reason. He was very intense all the time. I didn't mind playing for him because he left me alone, but there were other players on the team that, if they got him in the back room, they would have killed him."

On his idol: "My all-time idol was Stan Musial. And that's why I wanted to get #6, because I idolized Stan Musial -- the way he played the game, and the quiet person he was, the quality person that he was."

On his friendship with Ted Williams: "(In 1953) I'm in my room at the Kenmore Hotel, which was around the corner from Fenway Park back in the old days from the ballpark, Fenway Park. I get a call around 9 o'clock in the morning. 'Al.' I said, 'Yeah, who's this?' 'It's Ted.' 'Ted who?' 'Ted Williams.' 'Aw, yeah, what are you wakin' me up for?' (laughter) I figure it was some fan trying to wake me up in the morning. 'No, this is Ted. Come on down, I'm only a half a block away, down at the Somerset Hotel, and I want to talk to you.' And I said, 'OK.' Back in those days I had a brush cut. So I got in the shower (makes wiping sound over

head.) and I ran down there real quick. When God speaks, you run, baby, believe me! Well, I got there and he’s in the middle of the floor, and he had got a stand, and he’s making fish flies. He was a great fisherman and he loved fishing. And he’s talking to me about hitting. He said, ‘How are you going to hit – what are you looking for from Early Wynn?’ And I said, ‘I’m looking for—’ and he said, ‘Nuhnuhnuhnuh nuh, you know he’s going to throw that slider to you all the time,’ and now I’m scared to death. ’cause he asked me, and now I’m afraid to answer. Anyhow, he took a liking to me. He liked me a lot. Why, I don’t know.

“One time, which is probably the biggest thrill I ever had in my life, and I’ve had a lot of good experiences. working as an analyst with George Kell. We’re at Fenway Park. We’re up in the press room, having some dinner before we go on the air like all the freeloaders do. ... And then all of a sudden here comes Ted Williams, walking in the door. Now, everybody in the room gets up and wants to go see Ted or say something to him. And he says, ‘Out of my way! I come here for only one reason, and that’s to say hi to Al Kaline.’ He came to my table, shook my hand, asked how my wife was. I said fine and he took off. One of the great moments of my life when the man wanted to say hi to me.”

**THE LAST MONTH** – By David Raglin

When we last left you, the Tigers were 27-12, had just swept Baltimore and Boston, and were headed to Cleveland in their Zubaz outfits. That trip got derailed due to plane problems, with the team reaching Cleveland just in time to head to the park and get swept by the Indians. That unfortunately proved to be the theme for the next month, as the Tigers were derailed, and thirty days later, Detroit had gone 9-20 and fallen into second place after two shellackings and a tight loss at the hands of the Royals. The Tigers won the final game of the series against Kansas City and swept the Indians -- hopefully, a signal that things are turning the corner.

What happened? Since you are “Tigers Fans Who Always Care,” you saw the carnage and we don’t have to focus on the obvious. The first place to look is, of course, runs scored and runs allowed. In the 29 games, they scored 116 runs and allowed 174. By an odd quirk of math, that is exactly four runs scored and six runs allowed per game. Given that the average American League team has scored 4.27 runs per game, it would indicate that the pitching was a much bigger part of the problem than the hitting.

**WHAT’S UP WITH JV?** – By David Raglin

That’s the million dollar question (or really, \$150 million question, given that is the amount left on his contract). Let’s start by saying that this is a very difficult question to answer. Some really smart people like Dave Dombrowski, Brad Ausmus, Jeff Jones, top analysts at major baseball websites, and Justin Verlander himself don’t have the answer. While we won’t provide the answer, we will try to get some clues.

First, how bad has this stretch been? The table below shows it’s been really, really bad. In the seven starts between May 14 and June 16, Verlander had a 7.83 ERA, six starts with an ERA over 6/00, and three starts where he gave up more earned runs than he had innings pitched. (Note that we have left off his latest start against Cleveland where he allowed only two runs in seven innings, striking out eight. We hope that signals he’s back but we unfortunately can’t assume that.) Here’s the bad news:

**Justin Verlander: Seven Starts Between May 14 and June 16, 2014**

Date	Versus	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	Dec	ERA
May 14	at BAL	6.0	6	5	5	1	3	4	W	7.50
May 20	at CLE	6.0	11	5	5	0	3	2	L	7.50
May 25	TEX	5.1	11	9	6	1	3	1	L	10.13
May 30	at SEA	7.2	5	3	3	1	1	7	W	3.52
June 5	TOR	7.0	8	6	5	2	4	4	L	6.43
June 11	at CHW	5.2	8	7	7	1	4	6	L	11.12
June 16	KCR	6.0	12	7	7	1	2	2	L	10.50
Total	7 Games	43.2	61	42	38	7	20	26	2-5	7.83

This is the second straight year that Verlander has had a bad streak. However, when I went back and looked at it, last year's bad stretch was nowhere as bad as this year's. In 2013, Verlander allowed five or more runs six times all year. This year, he allowed five or more runs six times in seven starts. His worst seven game streak in 2013 saw him post a 5.98 ERA and included three quality starts.

One thing that has struck me is his propensity to be pitching pretty well (at least, not allowing many runs) and then the dam bursts and he allows a big inning. The stats show that is true. Below is the number of runs (earned or unearned) allowed by Verlander in each inning that he pitched for each start.

**Runs Allowed in Each Inning by Justin Verlander During the Bad Stretch**

Date	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
Wednesday May 14	0	0	0	0	5	0		
Tuesday May 20	1	4	0	0	0	0		
Sunday May 25	1	2	0	0	5	1		
Friday May 30	0	0	2	0	3	0	1	0
Thursday June 5	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	
Wednesday June 11	0	1	0	0	0	7		
Monday June 16	0	0	0	0	4	3		
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

The impression I had was true. Verlander actually did not pitch that bad early in games during the bad stretch. He allowed 14 runs in 28 innings, an average of 4.50 runs per nine innings. However, from the fifth on, he allowed 32 runs in 15.2 innings, an average of 18.38 runs per nine innings! In four of the seven starts he gave up three or more runs in the fifth inning, and he had two other innings of four or more runs allowed.

The chart below shows how extraordinary that is. It shows that in the 45 innings Verlander pitched in during the seven starts, he gave up three runs in four innings, four runs in two innings, and five or more runs three times. Contrast that with the second line, which shows, per 45 innings, how many times American League clubs give up zero runs, one run, etc. While the difference in scoreless innings is not that great (33 versus 29), Verlander had allowed three or more runs nine times compares with the league average of two.

**Justin Verlander Number of Times Allowing Zero Runs, One Run, Etc., During the Bad Stretch**

Pitcher	0 Runs	1 Run	2 Run	3 Runs	4 Runs	5+ Runs	Total
Justin Verlander	29	5	2	4	2	3	45
2014 AL Average Per 45 Innings	33	6	3	1	1	0	45

So, what's up with JV? Everybody has an opinion, so here's mine. Justin Verlander injured his core in December and had abdominal surgery in January. This hurt him in two ways: He had to recover from the surgery and could not follow his usual off-season conditioning plan. Verlander looked good in spring training and got off to a strong start, with a 1.93 ERA in his first eight starts. However, he could have been wearing himself out a bit and later in games, it has been enough to throw him off his game. Also, the Tigers have a rookie manager who has probably left Verlander in some starts a bit too long, assuming that as usual Verlander would right himself. The numbers in a few of those games would not have been a gruesome had he been pulled earlier.

So, what's Verlander's future? Justin looked good in his last start and hopefully has figured it out. When he struggled last year, he said he was not hurt and it was his mechanics, and he was right, so when he says the same thing this year, I tend to believe him. He has lost some off his fastball; John Fisher of ESPN reports that in 2009, 73.6 percent of his fastballs were 95+ MPH. In 2013, it had dropped to 31.1 percent and it is 19.4 percent this year. As a result, he is getting beat on the high fastball more. In 2009, 42 percent of his strikeouts came on high fastballs, compared to 8.4 percent this year. However, he is a smart pitcher, a bulldog of a competitor, and

he still has a good fastball (and it might be better next year after a normal offseason). He might not be the MVP-caliber Verlander anymore but I expect him to still be a really good pitcher.

**UNDERRATED ANIBAL** – By David Raglin

Getting lost in the shuffle to an extent is Anibal Sanchez. Sanchez is having an amazing season. The Tigers re-signed him as a free agent after the 2012 season to a five year-\$88 million dollar deal. At the time that seemed high but now it looks like another Dave Dombrowski steal. Sanchez missed about three weeks with shoulder pain, so he does not have enough innings yet for his 2.33 ERA to be in the league leaders, but he is eighth in the league in Wins Above Replacement for American League pitchers. In five starts during the bad stretch, he had a 2.08 ERA and went 2-0 (the Tigers lost the other three games due to offensive and bullpen problems).

**TIGERS HITTERS** – By David Raglin

Before I mentioned that the Tigers offense during the bad stretch was below average but not bad. Let’s look at how the main hitters did, ranked by the Bill James statistic runs created.

**Detroit Tigers Hitters During the Bad Stretch – May 19 to June 18, 2014**

Hitters	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	RC	RC/G
V Martinez	29	111	15	37	8	0	7	20	12	12	.333	.395	.595	26	9.1
Cabrera	29	103	17	33	10	0	5	17	14	17	.320	.395	.563	23	8.5
Kinsler	28	120	17	31	10	2	3	12	6	14	.258	.294	.450	16	4.5
Castellanos	28	99	7	31	9	0	1	6	8	20	.313	.361	.434	16	5.9
JD Martinez	18	58	7	20	5	0	5	15	3	16	.345	.371	.690	15	10.1
Davis	24	81	7	22	6	0	1	8	4	16	.272	.306	.383	9	4.1
Jackson	27	97	8	22	4	1	1	8	7	26	.227	.274	.320	9	2.9
Hunter	24	86	11	19	4	0	4	12	2	14	.221	.233	.407	8	3.2
Avila	25	74	8	15	4	0	2	4	13	28	.203	.337	.338	8	3.5

V-Mart and Miggy have been the core of the team, which I’m sure is no surprise to any Tigers fan. Last month, we wrote about Nick Castellanos that he would “figure it out.” It seems like he has. In particular we noticed that each time he received a promotion, he had trouble with strike zone judgment but eventually figured it out. That seems to be happening now. The Tigers were persistent about getting J.D. Martinez; they tried to get him from Houston but the Astros would not trade him. Instead, they eventually released him, and the Tigers pounced. On the other side, Austin Jackson and Torii Hunter make up two-third of a struggling outfield, and we are sad to report that after last month’s glowing report, Alex Avila is going through a tough time at the plate.

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 Washington, DC 20012

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