

Tigers Stripes

The Newsletter of the



Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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TRAM KNOWS — By Mark Pattison

Alan Trammell played 20 seasons for the Tigers. He's been retired only 19 years as an active player. He still looks like he could play shortstop. He says his glove is still OK, but "my range is off the charts this way," he adds, his left thumb plunging downward. But as deft as he was in the field, Trammell employed some nifty verbal footwork in talking about the Tigers, both the current crop and those of his era, during the Society's 31st Annual Gathering at the Hockeytown Cafe June 13 before the Tigers-Indians game.

Trammell was wearing a "Vote Miggy" T-shirt over a more typical deep-blue Tigers T-shirt with the Old English "D" over his heart. Miguel Cabrera, if it could be believed, was only second among American League first basemen in the new online-only fan voting for All-Star Game starters. To add to the puzzle, Cabrera hit a three-run homer the night before that went 450-plus feet in straightaway center field, the ball banging the shed where the camera operators work. "For somebody to hit a ball that far is incredible," Trammell said. "Our hero, Al Kaline — Mr. Tiger himself — has said Miguel Cabrera is the best hitter he's ever seen in a Tiger uniform." To illustrate Cabrera's power, Trammell disclosed that during a draft-prospect tryout the week before, with about 20 hitters each taking 20-25 swings, "maybe three or four balls were hit out."

Speaking of the draft, Trammell was high on Detroit's top pick, Beau Burrows, a high school pitcher from Texas. "A high school pitcher is going to take a few more years (to develop), but we think it's worth the wait," he said. He said the Tigers had a side board with the names of a 100 or so potential draftees scouts had red-flagged for "medical, makeup or sign ability" issues — including a few other teams' first-round picks "we couldn't have picked because of medical red flags."

Not surprisingly, Trammell also likes the Tigers' fifth-round pick, Michigan State outfielder Cam Gibson, son of his longtime teammate and coaching buddy Kirk. Lest anyone think that fifth-rounders aren't worth much, Trammell reminded the 120 in attendance that Detroit fifth-rounders included Lou Whitaker in 1975 and Jack Morris in 1976.

In reviewing his career, Trammell puts Detroit's World Series championship year of 1984 as his top highlight. He was named World Series MVP by going 9-for-20 in the five games, with two homers in Game 4. He lists 1987 as his second-favorite year. "It was my best year statistically," as he hit .343 with 28 homers and 105 RBI as he hit cleanup after the collusion-induced departure of Lance Parrish to the Phillies. The Tigers started slow and wound up with the majors' best record, beating Toronto which crumbled down the stretch, although Detroit lost to Minnesota in the AL playoffs. And Trammell finished second to George Bell in AL MVP voting.

Trammell recalls his manager, Sparky Anderson, calling him after the vote was announced. "I wish you would've won," Trammell said Anderson told him. "It would help you with the Hall of Fame." "I thought, 'Damn, I've got a few years left (to play).'" Now he understands Sparky's prophecy, But Trammell, with just one year left on the writers' ballot, has made peace with the likelihood he won't get chosen in 2016, either: "It wouldn't change me then, it wouldn't change me now."

Given that, Trammell holds out hope for consideration by the Hall of Fame Veterans Committee. Should that happen, "I want it to be with my partner," Lou Whitaker. "I'd like to be with Lou. When we get to the Veterans Committee ... somehow, some way, we could be brought in together."

For more on Trammell's remarks at the Annual Gathering, put in a request on Facebook to join the Mayo Smith Society page.

ANNUAL GATHERING A BIG SUCCESS — BUT — By Mark Pattison

The Society's 31st Annual Gathering has been a growing success, building on past gatherings held this decade at the Hockeytown Cafe. We time the event to begin four hours before the Tigers game later that day, we find a great Tiger to talk to us, we have good food, good fun, and a good time,

And 2015 was no exception. Not only did Tigers great and should-be Hall of Famer Alan Trammell grace us with his presence for an hour of remarks plus lively questions and answers (see separate story), we had so much more.

Topping the list was Charles Leerhsen, author of the new book "Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty." Leerhsen said he had set out to write a book to heap more scorn on the Georgia Peach, which began with Al Stump's article in the pathetically misnamed True magazine shortly after Cobb's death 54 years ago. But, with the more research he conducted, the more Leerhsen found that Cobb sharpening his spikes and even killing people — "it's well known," Ron Shelton, director of the movie "Cobb," averred to Leerhsen — turned out to be either myths or just plain untrue. "I wouldn't be surprised to find out (on the Web) that Ty Cobb was deflating baseballs," he said.

Cobb, according to Leerhsen, became "the first baseball celebrity" thanks to his feats on the field. "People really didn't ask baseball players for their autographs" back then, Leerhsen said, "Baseball players were like carneys, playing with a hangover — sometimes drunk and had to be taken off the field."

Ty Cobb, Leerhsen acknowledged, was a fierce, high-strung, combative player. But "he was the most exciting player of his day, the biggest draw of his day," even getting an award in Chicago for being the most popular opposing player.

(A review of "Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty," will appear in a future issue of *Tigers Stripes*, and more excerpts from Leerhsen's appearance will be posted on the Society's Facebook page.)

Scott Ferkovich also talked about the effort behind "Detroit the Unconquerable," a book of biographical profiles of every player during the Tigers' first World Series-winning squad in 1935, 80 years ago. Ferkovich had made a brief presentation two years ago in his work in compiling the writers to pen the biographies.

But the best story was told by Society member Scott Dominiak, who heard Ferkovich in 2013. He approached Ferkovich afterward and said he'd like to participate. Ferkovich told Dominiak there was just one player left unclaimed by any writer: the obscure Hugh Shelley, who played for Detroit three months and didn't get into the Fall Classic.

Dominiak did his research and turned in the first draft of his Shelley bio. It was all of 150 words. He said Ferkovich told him, "It's OK, but it's about 1,350 words short." Dominiak went back to the drawing board, going to the Hall of Fame library for any details it had on Shelley as well as contacting libraries in Beaumont, Texas, where Shelley played in the minors before being brought up to Detroit and where he settled after his playing days were over.

He found an obituary for Shelley's widow, who died less than a decade ago, and spotted the names of surviving children. Luck! Dominiak tracked down one of Shelley's daughters and went to interview her. She was helpful, but the biggest boost came from her husband, who told Dominiak, "You know, my mother-in-law kept a scrapbook of all her husband's clippings." Can you spell pay dirt? Now Dominiak, with his bio complete and the book published, plans to take his family to Texas to meet Shelley's descendants.

Society administrator Todd Miller devised a wicked 20-question trivia quiz, but three attendees claimed perfect scores: Society member Mark Bernasconi and two preadolescent brothers. In a tiebreaker to guess a number between 1 and 99, Bernasconi and Drew won copies of "Detroit Tigers Lists and More" (which you can get for yourself; see ordering information on the bottom of page 4), while Drew's brother came closest and won a pair of the Society's box seat tickets to the Sept. 4 Tigers-Indians game.

And, while we're talking about Tigers and Indians, the Society faithful got to see the return of Justin Verlander, who gave up two runs in five innings in his 2015 season debut. The lead didn't hold up, however, as a leaky bullpen put the Tigers on the losing side of a 5-4 contest — the first loss of an Annual Gathering game since 2007. We'd say better luck next year, but this year isn't over yet!

AN AVERAGE TEAM – By David Raglin

As this is being written, the Tigers are 34-32, a smidge over .500. They have earned that spot, as they have been an average team. They have scored 4.18 runs per game, a tad under the American League average of 4.22. They have allowed 4.14 runs per game, just a touch more than the 4.10 league average. No other team is closer to the league averages in both categories, combined, than the Tigers.

The strengths and weaknesses of this Tiger team have been well-documented. Let’s start with the strengths. Miguel Cabrera is having another season that is propelling him to a first ballot Hall of Fame election sometime next decade. He is second in the league in batting average by .002, leads the league in RBIs, on-base percentage and slugging percentage, and third in the league in Wins Above Replacement at the plate. He is getting close to being a Hall of Famer even if his career ended today. David Price and Alfredo Simon are both in the top 10 in the league in ERA. Weaknesses include the back end of the rotation and Nick Castellanos.

A FEW WORDS ON CASTELLANOS – By David Raglin

Castellanos has been a huge disappointment this season. Last year, he had a really good year at the plate for a 22-year-old: 11 homers, 66 RBIs, a .259 average, 65 runs created, and 4.3 runs created per game (which is just about the league average.) His defense was terrible (arguably the worst defensive player in baseball based on modern defensive stats), but that was somewhat understandable after being shuffled around the field during his minor league career. He vowed to work on his glove, and he has made admirable progress, with stats that put him just a bit under the league average. However, his bat has gone south; he has 2.6 runs created per game, meaning a team of Nicks would score just 2.6 runs per game. Nick seems to be having trouble telling a fastball from a slider and he has struggled with the low outside pitch.

On the other hand, let’s not add Castellanos to the list of players that Tigers fans seem to love to hate with unfortunate zeal (Brandon Inge, Todd Jones, Ryan Raburn, Joe Nathan, to name a few). He is only 23 years old—at the age of 23, Victor Martinez was making his major league debut as a September callup. But, it does say something about baseball prospects. A few years ago, Tiger fans insisted that Castellanos was untouchable and should be playing for the major league team at the age of 20 and 21.

DEE-FENSE! – By David Raglin

We wrote a couple of months ago about the improved defense. Let’s check back on that. According to Baseball Info Systems’ Runs Saved, the Tigers are fourth in the American League with 18 runs saved in the field compared to an average team. The Tigers are above average at all positions except pitcher, catcher, and right field. (The top three teams are Kansas City (+41), Toronto (+25), and Houston (+25), and the worst team, by far, is the White Sox at -46.)

This correlates well with one of my favorite defensive stats, Defensive Efficiency Rating (DER). Invented by Bill James more than 30 years ago, it is simply the percentage of balls hit in the field that are turned into outs—no fancy formula, no model, just counting balls hit and outs. As you will see, our Tigers show up pretty high on this list.

Defensive Efficiency Rating, MLB Teams, As of June 18, 2015

MLB Team	DER	MLB Team	DER	MLB Team	DER	MLB Team	DER
Kansas City	.718	San Francisco	.703	Pittsburgh	.693	Philadelphia	.676
LA Angels	.711	Seattle	.702	Minnesota	.690	San Diego	.674
Toronto	.711	Miami	.696	Atlanta	.688	Milwaukee	.670
Cincinnati	.708	Texas	.695	NY Mets	.688	Cleveland	.666
DETROIT	.706	Arizona	.694	Boston	.685	Washington	.660
Houston	.706	LA Dodgers	.694	Chi Cubs	.685	Chi White Sox	.656
Tampa Bay	.706	Oakland	.694	NY Yankees	.677	MLB Average	.691
Baltimore	.705	St. Louis	.694	Colorado	.676		

The Tigers have the fifth best DER in baseball this year. Last year, the Tigers were 29th at .673. They were 26th in 2013 (.682) and 2012 (.678). The last time they were above the MLB average was 2009.

Who is responsible for this? Certainly, Jose Iglesias is the first name that comes to mind, especially since he was not here last year, but other defensive stars have been Ian Kinsler (just as he was last year), and Yoenis Cespedes. The other big factor is that they Tigers have no bad defensive players in the lineup.

MORE MISCELLANEOUS STUFF – By David Raglin

Now let's look at baserunning. Every fan is convinced that his or her team gets thrown out on the bases far too often. The third base coach is often the most unpopular guy in town. The average major league team has been thrown out on the bases 23 times this year. (This does not include caught-stealings or pickoffs, just outs on hit balls.) The Tigers are (again) average, having been thrown out 22 times. The extremes come from Florida—Tampa Bay has the most at 34 and Miami the least at 16. For plays at home, the Tigers have been thrown out eight times, one more time than the average of seven, with the range going from four to 11.

The Tigers are fourth in the majors with 52 steals, but they have been caught the most times at 27. The generally accepted break-even point in stolen base attempts is that a team needs to have two steals for every time caught stealing. The Tigers are slightly below that mark, so it can be argued that the Tigers stealing attempts have gained the team basically nothing. The Tigers top two steal guys have been Rajai Davis (14 SB, 3 CS), and Anthony Gose (11 SB, 5 CS). All of Gose's attempts have been for second base except for the time he was caught at home. To contrast, Davis is 9-for-11 trying to steal second and 5-for-6 when going for third. Two Tigers have been particularly bad base stealers—Andrew Romine is 4-for-9 and Yoenis Cespedes is 3-for-7.

In terms of advancing extra bases on hits (first to third on a single, second to home on a single, first to home on a double), the Tigers are below average—they have taken the extra base 35 percent of the time they could, compared to the MLB average of 42 percent with a range from 33 to 48 percent. The top Tiers has been Anthony Gose, who has grabbed the extra base 68 percent of the time. On the other side of the ledger, Victor Martinez and Alex Avila are at 9 percent and 8 percent respectively. This is consistent with past years.

Which teams have been particularly unlucky this year? Two that come to mind are the Oakland Athletics and the Toronto Blue Jays. The A's have a terrible record at 29-40 and pundits are looking who they might sell off as the trade deadline approaches. However, they have scored 4.4 runs per game while allowing 3.9 runs per game. Normally a team outscoring their opponents would have a much better record; a Bill James formula from long suggest that they should have 38-31 record. Those differences tend to be luck, so look for the A's to surge. The Jays have been surging, climbing above .500 with a 36-32 record. However, they have scored 5.5 runs per game while allowing 4.3, which should give them something closer to a 42-26 record. This very well might be the year Toronto breaks the longest postseason drought in baseball (they have not made the playoffs since they won back-to-back World Series championships in 1992 and 1993. No team has been especially lucky, winning many more games than their record suggests.

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