

Tigers Stripes

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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ON THE EDGE – By David Raglin

Our Tigers are on the edge of falling out of the American League playoff picture. After dropping two of three to fellow wild card contender Baltimore in the first weekend after the All-Star Break, they have fallen under .500 at 45-46. They are 10½ games behind the Royals (and 4½ behind the Twins) in the American League Central, and behind three teams in the race for the wild-card game.

Is this season over or can the Tigers come back? Should they buy or sell? That's what we are going to look at in this issue of *Tigers Stripes*.

Let's start with the basics, which is where we usually start. The Tigers have scored 4.48 runs per game, third in the league and 0.28 runs per game more than the league average of 4.20. They have allowed 4.70 runs per game, last in the league, and 0.59 runs per game worse than the league average. Therefore, look at the pitching to start.

GOING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION – By David Raglin

The runs allowed per game has been getting much worse. Remember last month, we talked about the Tigers being an average team, allowing 4.14 runs per game, just a tad above the league average of 4.10 runs per game? Since then, they have allowed 6.20 runs per game. The biggest problem has been the starting pitching. Here are their stats from June 18 to July 19 (the time since our last issue of *Tigers Stripes*):

Detroit Tigers Starting Pitchers, June 18-July 19, 2015

Name	G	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	W	L	ERA
David Price	5	34.7	34	9	7	3	5	39	3	1	1.82
Anibal Sanchez	5	33.7	29	17	16	6	14	26	4	0	4.28
Justin Verlander	5	29.0	36	24	23	7	10	20	0	3	7.14
Buck Farmer	1	8.7	13	7	7	2	3	11	0	1	7.27
Kyle Ryan	3	11.0	17	12	12	3	8	7	0	1	9.82
Alfredo Simon	5	22.7	47	30	28	5	9	19	1	3	11.12
Shane Greene	1	4.7	7	7	7	2	3	2	0	1	13.50
Total	25	144.3	183	106	100	28	52	124	8	10	6.24
Total w/o Price & Sanchez	15	76.0	120	80	77	19	33	59	1	9	9.12

David Price has been magnificent and Anibal Sanchez has been OK (no great starts but no terrible ones), but the rest of the starting pitching has been terrible. Justin Verlander shows flashes of brilliance but often seems to have that one terrible inning that kills his starts. Alfredo Simon had an ERA of 2.58 but since then has allowed 7, 5, 6, 5, and 5 earned runs in his last five starts, not getting out of the third inning in two of them. The spot starters (Buck Farmer, Kyle Ryan and Shane Greene) have not done the job of keeping the team in the game.

Clearly, if the Tigers are going to contend, they need to get better performances out of Justin Verlander and Alfredo Simon -- and they need to make a trade to get a better starter because the spot guys are not working. Having both happen seems like a very tall order.

Looking at this, it seems clear that the Tigers should re-sign David Price, right? Well...

RE-SIGN PRICE? – By David Raglin

Where would the Tigers be without David Price this year? I don't know but from what you saw above, given that the Tigers are only 2½ games out of last place with him -- and their biggest weakness right now is lack of starting pitching depth -- well, you can make a guess.

Therefore, it is clear we should re-sign Price, no matter the cost, right? Certainly, that is what a lot of the fans are asking for. Before you say yes, let's look back at history and do a comparison.

Justin Verlander and David Price: The Three Seasons Before the Big Contract

Justin Verlander													
Year	Age	Team	G	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	W	L	ERA
2010	27	Detroit	33	224.3	190	89	84	14	71	219	18	9	3.37
2011	28	Detroit	34	251.0	174	73	67	24	57	250	24	5	2.40
2012	29	Detroit	33	238.3	192	81	70	19	60	239	17	8	2.64
Total			100	713.7	556	243	221	57	188	708	59	22	2.79

David Price (2015 stats are projected to a full season based on his stats through July 19)													
Year	Age	Team	G	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO	W	L	ERA
2013	27	Tampa Bay	27	186.7	178	78	69	16	27	151	10	8	3.33
2014	28	TB/Detroit	34	248.3	230	100	90	25	38	271	15	12	3.26
2015	29	Detroit	34	235.0	215	77	61	18	46	226	16	5	2.34
Total			95	670.0	623	255	220	59	111	648	41	25	2.96

I will admit I was thrilled when the Tigers extended Justin Verlander's contract at the end of spring training in 2013. (When I called to tell my brother Phil, who was at the Tigers spring training game that day, he was not happy. He was concerned whether Verlander would hold up, and he wondered why the rush to re-sign him with two years left on his contract.)

After all, you can see from his career stats, and especially his previous three seasons (shown above), that he was an elite pitcher. Unfortunately, we all know what has happened the last two seasons to Verlander. We hope he will figure out what is wrong and at least be a solid major league starter, but it certainly has not gone well so far.

If anything, Verlander's contract is even more of an albatross on the current Tigers than just how he's pitching now. Given their investment in him, it'd be very surprising if he comes out of the rotation unless he gets hurt again. Therefore, when the Tigers need wins the most, trying to claw their way back into the race, every five days they will be starting a pitcher who seemingly gives the team a very small chance of winning. We've seen that happen before. Dontrelle Willis' contract cost the Tigers the 2009 division title. Willis got seven starts in 2009. The Tigers went 2-5 in those games, with four of the losses the result of Willis' bad starts. Another pitcher would not have been given that many chances to succeed. The Tigers ended up tied for the Division at the end of the season and lost the one-game playoff to the Twins.

There was one big difference between Verlander's and Price's situation; Verlander was not a free agent and his new contract did not take effect until the start of the 2015 season. That might be more evidence that giving Verlander the extension two years early was a mistake, but in terms of Price, it does not change the situation. Should the Tigers give a pitcher who will be 30 years old a long-term contract? As much as I would love to have the current David Price on our team next year and for years in the future, history indicates that is not we would get.

J.D.! – By David Raglin

Wow! The legend of J.D. Martinez grows bigger. After a strong spring training and start to the season, it looked like pitchers had caught up to him. As you can see, as of early June, his number were not terrible, but nowhere near what he did last year.

He clearly found out what was going on, though, because over the last month plus, he has been on fire!

J.D. Martinez, Before and After

Date	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
Apr 6 to Jun 6, 2015	56	213	31	54	12	0	9	23	18	68	.254	.316	.437	.753	29	4.6
Jun 7 to Jul 19, 2015	33	128	27	43	4	0	17	37	8	33	.336	.384	.766	1.150	37	11.0

It's also interesting to look at his left-right splits. As a righty, he should hit lefties better, and he did in 2014 (while still doing well against righties), but this year, he has really done a good job against righties:

J.D. Martinez, Platoon Splits, 2015

Opposing Pitcher	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
vs Left-Handed Pitchers	68	15	18	0	0	5	14	12	27	.265	.375	.485	.860	12	6.3
vs Right-Handed Pitchers	273	43	79	16	0	21	46	14	74	.289	.332	.579	.911	51	6.7

He is walking more against lefties, but has had shown more power against righties. Left-right platoon splits can be problematic with so few plate appearances (especially against lefties), but the key numbers to me are his power numbers against right-handers. That is more evidence that, while I don't expect him to do as well as he has the last few weeks, I expect him to continue to be a solid power hitter.

THE 19-GAME LOSING STREAK – By David Raglin and Mark Pattison

Forty years ago, the Tigers finished with the worst record in the league for only the second time, going 57-102. The lowlight of the season was the longest losing streak in team history and tied for the seventh longest since the start of the NL-AL era in 1901.

Before the losing streak, things were not going that bad. They hung around .500 the first two months of the season, with a 23-24 record on June 7. They then went through their first bad stretch, going 5-22 to drop them to 28-46. But, then they won eight in a row and nine of 10 to get back to 37-46, and went .500 over the next 18 for a 46-55 record. Then the bottom fell out:

Detroit Tigers 19-Game Losing Streak in 1975

Date	Versus	Score	Record	GB	Winning Pit	Losing Pit	Save	Time
Tuesday, Jul 29	@ New York	2-4	46-56	15	Medich	Coleman	Martinez	2:15
Wednesday, Jul 30	@ New York	1-2	46-57	15	May	Lolich		1:52
Thursday, Jul 31 (1)	@ Boston	2-3 (10)	46-58	17	Lee	Reynolds		2:31
Thursday, Jul 31 (2)	@ Boston	1-6	46-59	17	Moret	Lemanczyk		2:18
Friday, Aug 1	@ Boston	7-8	46-60	18	Willoughby	Pentz		2:29
Saturday, Aug 2	@ Boston	2-7	46-61	19	Wise	Ruhle		2:38
Sunday, Aug 3	@ Boston	4-6	46-62	20	Cleveland	Walker	Willoughby	1:56
Monday, Aug 4	@ Cleveland	4-6	46-63	20	Eckersley	Lolich	Brown	2:27
Tuesday, Aug 5	@ Cleveland	4-8	46-64	20	Raich	Bare	Waits	2:59
Wednesday, Aug 6 (1)	Baltimore	2-4	46-65	21.5	Torrez	LaGrow	Garland	2:12
Wednesday, Aug 6 (2)	Baltimore	2-8	46-66	21.5	Grimsley	Lemanczyk	Miller	2:30
Thursday, Aug 7	Baltimore	6-7 (10)	46-67	22.5	Miller	Reynolds		2:55

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Friday, Aug 8	Minnesota	1-3	46-68	22.5	Hughes	Coleman	2:26
Saturday, Aug 9	Minnesota	0-1	46-69	23.5	Goltz	Lolich	2:24
Sunday, Aug 10	Minnesota	0-4	46-70	24.5	Blyleven	Bare	1:56
Monday, Aug 11	Texas	0-7	46-71	24.5	Perry	LaGrow	2:52
Tuesday, Aug 12	Texas	3-4	46-72	25.5	Perzanowski	Ruhle Foucault	2:24
Wednesday, Aug 13	Texas	5-6 (11)	46-73	25.5	Foucault	Pentz	2:50
Friday, Aug 15	@ California	0-8	46-74	26	Tanana	Lolich	2:16

As you can imagine in a 19-game losing streak, both the offense and the pitching struggled. The Tigers scored 46 runs (2.42 per game) and allowed 102 runs (5.37 per game). Ten of the first 12 games were against the top three teams in the six-team American League East (New York, Boston, Baltimore) by the end of the streak came against teams with losing records.

There were six Tigers left from the 1968 championship team. Five had been teammates for 12 consecutive seasons: Mickey Lolich, Bill Freehan, Willie Horton, Gates Brown, and Mickey Stanley), and John Hiller was the sixth. Take note that Hiller, the Tigers' bullpen ace and a hero to Detroit fans for his All-Star comeback from two heart attacks, did not get charged with a loss during the losing streak.

To understand some of 1975, you have to remember 1974. It was Al Kaline's last season in his 22-year career, DHing to get enough plate appearances to reach the 3,000-hit plateau. General manager Jim Campbell did a late-season purge of other holdovers from the 1968 team, most notably Norm Cash and Jim Northrup, saying he had let the team grow old, but got nothing in return for them. The Tigers finished 72-90 in their first season under Ralph Houk, good for the first of two straight cellar-dwelling finishes in the AL East.

After the pennant-push chaos of the Billy Martin era 1971-73 (it turned out to be Brash Billy's second-longest managerial stint of his big-league career), Campbell had brought Houk in, both knowing it was going to be a rebuilding era. And it turned out to be so. Nobody was calling for Houk's scalp as they do today for Brad Ausmus', or Jim Leyland's before him. It must be noted that Martin never left a managerial post on his own accord, while Houk never got fired, always staying a step ahead of the sheriff (and George Steinbrenner).

The last-place finishes netted Detroit prime position in the draft to pick up key talent as building blocks for the franchise's resurgence, culminating in the Tigers' 1984 World Series-winning squad. Some of those players were 1975 picks first baseman Jason Thompson, fourth round (who didn't stick around long enough to taste the champagne); second baseman Lou Whitaker, fifth round; and 1974 first-rounder catcher Lance Parrish. A 10th-round pick from 1974, pitcher Mark Fidrych, provided some welcome relief from the tedium of losing, and distracted fans while the front office worked to rebuild the club.

The team's "long national nightmare" ended Aug. 16, when Ray Bare broke the skid with a two-hit, 8-0 shutout against the Angels. That victory earned Bare a prominent notch in team history, even if he was just 15-23, 4.94 in his three seasons with the Tigers, and was out of the majors for good barely past his 28th birthday.

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