

Tigers Stripes

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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PEELING BACK THE ONION – By David Raglin

We could provide the same summary of the Tigers' season that we've presented before, that of a .500 club with lots of good news- (Nick Castellano's breakout season at the plate, Ian Kinsler's solid excellence, Justin Verlander's return to excellence --OK, we can't resist In his last 13 starts, Verlander has allowed 67 hits in 89.2 innings, with 97 strikeouts, 22 walks, and a 2.91 ERA), and lots of bad news (Justin Upton's disappointing year, the failures of Anibal Sanchez and Mike Pelfrey, Mark Lowe's problems). That's the story of a .500 club in a nutshell. However, most of that is not news to you. So, we are delving into some specific stats to help explain why we are seeing what we are seeing with this team.

LEFT IS RIGHT – By David Raglin

In the June issue of *Tigers Stripes*, we noted that the Tigers were hitting righthanded pitchers much better than southpaws, a surprise since the Tigers are such a heavily righthanded team, in part to facing excellent lefties on the mound. It's not a surprise that has not continued. Below are three tables. The first is the one from the June issue that prompted the article, the second is what they have done against lefties and righties since then, and the third is the total for the season:

The Tigers Against Lefties and Righties: A Changing Story

April 5-May 22	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	85	294	.274	.328	.455	.783	171	5.3

May 23-July 16	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
Left-Handed	506	82	141	26	6	20	77	54	122	.279	.348	.472	.821	83	5.9
Right-Handed	1159	154	305	49	5	42	149	99	271	.263	.321	.423	.744	158	4.8

2016 Season	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
Left-Handed	837	121	219	36	6	31	114	88	204	.262	.332	.430	.762	119	5.0
Right-Handed	2312	313	621	107	13	87	303	184	565	.269	.326	.439	.765	328	5.0

As you can see from the third table, their stats against lefthanders and right-handers are now very similar (focusing on the percentage stats; the totals will be different because there are so many more right-handers.) The second table indicates that they have been hitting lefthanders very well the last couple of months. It also shows they are still hitting right-handers pretty well—the runs created per game was 5.3 in the first period and 4.8 in the second period. That is key since they will continue to see mostly righties.

RUNNING THE BASES – By David Raglin

The Tigers have been known as a poor baserunning team for several years. The stats show things have not changed. The table below looks at two types of baserunning stats. First is OOB, the number of outs on the basepaths on hit balls other than force-outs. The table below says the Tigers are a little above average on that stat, 35 times versus the average of 32. Three players for the Tigers, Jose Iglesias, Nick Castellanos and Miguel Cabrera, lead the time with five putouts on the bases.

The more important stat, though, comes from the next three columns. It shows the percentage of time runners take an extra base on a hit. If a runner is on first and the batter hits a single, the runner gets credit for taking an extra base if he goes to third. Also, the runner gets credit if he is on first and scores on a double or a is on second and scores on a single. The column “Chances” is the number of times a runner had an opportunity to take an extra base on a hit, and “Adv” is the number of times he took the extra base. The “%Adv” column is Adv / Chances, the percentage of time the runner took the extra base.

Baserunning Stats: American League Teams and Tigers Players

AL Team	OOB	Chances	Adv	%Adv
Cleveland	34	303	146	48.2
Minnesota	30	286	128	44.8
Texas	41	350	154	44.0
Tampa Bay	31	227	96	42.3
Baltimore	25	334	141	42.2
Toronto	29	369	151	40.9
Houston	29	370	148	40.0
Los Angeles	40	313	125	39.9
Boston	37	273	109	39.9
Chicago	30	308	123	39.9
Kansas City	33	345	136	39.4
Oakland	33	309	117	37.9
Seattle	35	308	115	37.6
New York	24	314	115	36.6
DETROIT	35	335	119	35.5
AL Average	32	316	130	41.1

Tiger Player	OOB	Chances	Adv	%Adv
Andrew Romine	2	7	5	71.4
Ian Kinsler	5	42	25	59.5
Cameron Maybin	1	28	15	53.6
Mike Aviles	1	11	5	45.5
Jose Iglesias	5	34	15	44.1
Jarrod Saltalamacchia	1	14	6	42.9
Justin Upton	1	31	13	41.9
Anthony Gose	1	5	2	40.0
J.D. Martinez	3	30	10	33.3
Nick Castellanos	5	32	10	31.3
Miguel Cabrera	5	45	8	17.8
Steven Moya	1	8	1	12.5
Victor Martinez	2	34	3	8.8
James McCann	2	13	1	7.7
Bobby Wilson	0	1	0	0.0
Tigers Total	35	335	119	35.5

The left side shows the 15 American League teams, and the Tigers are dead last in the percentage of extra bases taken. The right side shows who the culprits are. It’s not surprising the older players are at the bottom of the list. We love Victor Martinez, and there are a lot of reasons for him to bat fourth, but he really clogs the basepaths when he gets on. With him and Miggy back-to-back, if they get on it’s tough to get them in without a extra-base hit. A righty-laden lineup not going the opposite way and poking singles into left doesn’t help, either.

“CLUTCH” STATS – By David Raglin

Clutch stats have almost a mystical status in our National Pastime. Fans revere the players that they say take it up a notch when the game is on the line, like it is a character thing. They also tend to not forget the times the players on the team fail to drive in the big run and complain their team needs to do better in those situations.

Fans are used to stats such as hitting with runners in scoring position that measure “inning clutch”, maximizing the number of runs scored in an inning, or late and close that measure “game clutch,” maximizing the chance to win the game. Defining those situations is not easy, though. A recent innovation that we’ve had in *Tigers Stripes* is “leverage”. People have come up with the probability of winning the game given any situation (for example, two out in the bottom of the sixth, away team up 2-1, one out and a runner on first, the away team has a 72 percent chance of winning.) They have divided all situations into the 20 percent of situations that have the highest chance to change the result of the game, the 40 percent that are in the middle, and the 40 that have the least chance of changing the result. The beauty of this is that it takes into account both inning clutch and game clutch.

Below is a table that shows how the Tigers have hit in high, medium, and low leverage situations.

Detroit Tigers—Hitting in Key Situations

Split	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS
High Leverage	501	147	134	21	3	20	140	57	119	.267	.343	.441	.784
Medium Leverage	1185	171	331	66	5	51	163	86	273	.279	.330	.473	.803
Low Leverage	1462	114	375	56	11	47	112	129	377	.256	.320	.406	.726

The Tigers have hit much better in high-leverage situations, the times where the game is most on the line, and worst in low-leverage situations. That would indicate they have been doing the job in clutch situations.

THE EFFECT OF THE DEFENSE – By David Raglin

One of the new stats that has gained popularity is FIP, which stands for Fielding-Independent Pitching. It's like an ERA, only accounting for the situations the pitcher has control over (i.e.-not involving his fielders): home runs, strikeouts, walks, and hit batters and set so the league average FIP is the same as the league average ERA. I don't totally buy it; the pitcher has influence on how hard he is hit, and hard-hit balls are easier to turn into outs than soft-hit balls, but it does have value to show the effects of fielders.

The Tigers are 13th in ERA with a 4.57 ERA, compared to the AL-wide average of 4.27. However, they are fourth in the league in FIP with a 4.18 mark, behind Houston, Cleveland, New York and virtually tied with Toronto and Chicago. That is an indication that the fielding has hurt the pitchers and maybe the pitching (as frustrating as it's been) has not been that bad after all.

Defensive Runs Saved (DRS), a statistic developed by Bill James and Baseball Info Systems, is one of the modern defensive stats and says the same thing about the Tigers as FIP. They estimate that the Tigers have allowed 47 more runs than the average team because of the defense (out of 437 runs allowed total, or about 10 percent of runs allowed). Here is the distribution by position, noting that zero is league average by definition:

Detroit Tigers Defensive Runs Saves (DRS) by Position

Team	P	C	1B	2B	3B	SS	LF	CF	RF	Shifts	Total
Detroit Tigers	-1	-3	3	6	-10	2	-3	-18	-19	6	-43

DRS estimates the three problem positions for the Tigers are third base, center field, and right field. Third base is Nick Castellanos. He had a very rough rookie year with a -30, arguably the worst defensive player in baseball. He vowed to work on his fielding and improved to a -9 in 2015. This year, his bat has come alive but he is a -9 in just over a half a season, projecting to a -16 for a full season. We still think he will get better with more time at third. Centerfield has been Cameron Maybin and Anthony Gose. Maybin has been the biggest problem here with a -10 (playing an infielder and two corner outfielders in center has not helped, though). DRS did not rate Maybin highly last year with a -16. Unfortunately, with Justin Upton and J.D. Martinez in the corners and VMart at DH, there are no other options for Maybin.

J.D has had a bad year in right field, which is a bit surprising since he was good last year. He is a -11 for 2016 so far compared to a +4 last year and a 0 in 2014. He has regressed in both his range and his arm. Hopefully he will play more like the 2014 and 2015 J.D when he returns from the disabled list.

SOCIETY BOOKSHELF: "TERROR IN THE CITY OF CHAMPIONS" – Review by Mark Pattison

Those of us who lived vicariously through the 1968 World Series championship Tigers team tend to sentimentalize it as the team bringing a tense and divided city together. While it was true to some extent, winning the Fall Classic was only a salve on the city's wounds. The world title did little to stem the city's decline in terms of white flight, capital flight, or crime fight.

Much the same can be said of the Tigers' first world championship team in 1935. The city was in the throes of the Great Depression. Poverty and all its attendant ills were rife. But the Tigers were a tonic. So too were the Detroit Lions, recently transplanted from Youngstown, Ohio; the Detroit Red Wings, which were firing on all cylinders after some early-franchise name changes; and boxer Joe Louis. The Lions won the

National Football League title, and the Red Wings claimed the Stanley Cup. Louis wasn't a boxing champion yet, but was recognized as the best heavyweight around.

Yet even with saturation coverage of Detroit's sports heroes, there were other stories in the headlines. Author Tom Stanton focuses on one particularly disturbing series of episodes in the Motor City's legacy: the Black Legion, a secretive self-styled vigilante group that forced people to join under penalty of death, and often made beatings or murders of blacks or Catholics or Jews or leftists part of its initiation rite. There is where the book gets its subtitle "Murder, Baseball, and the Secret Society That Shocked Depression-Era Detroit."

Stanton has long been masterful at depicting game action, be it baseball play-by-play, or the stroke-by-stroke golf match between Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth. He's no different here, His thrilling detail of the conclusion of the World Series and the clubhouse pandemonium is exceptional.

As fate would have it, the Tigers' luck started running out around the same time the Black Legion's did. Catcher-manager Mickey Cochrane, an Irish Protestant, was hospitalized for several weeks during the 1936 season with nervous exhaustion. The trade that brought Hall of Famer Al Simmons, a Cochrane teammate during their days with the Philadelphia Athletics, didn't work out as planned and clubhouse discord simmered without "Black Mike" on hand to tamp it down. And the Black Legion simply grew too big for its britches and was summarily brought down by the Detroit police and the city's courts.

But if you're looking for smoking guns, you're not likely to find any. There were no Black Legion members on the Tigers or any other team. Any Catholic-vs.-Protestant enmity on the club seems to have been either nonexistent or deeply buried. It's certainly nothing like the religion-based cliques on the Chicago "Black Sox" of 1919. In fact, Hank Greenberg, Detroit's slugging star, had pretty much convinced his minor-league teammates in Beaumont, Texas, that -- contrary to what they might have heard at home or in church -- Jews didn't have horns or tails extending from their backsides. What's more, the Black Legion's leaders had quite a conundrum rooting for a team whose two best players were the Jewish slugger Greenberg and the Catholic "Mechanical Man," Charlie Gehringer, but they usually managed to schedule their mayhem after the ballgames.

The closest Stanton gets to any connection between the Tigers and assorted high crimes and misdemeanors is that Cochrane was neighbors with Harry Bennett, who was in charge of the Ford Motor Co.'s infamous "service department," whose goons -- Black Sox hurler (and onetime Tiger) Eddie Cicotte among them -- were responsible for breaking up protests like the Ford Hunger March and union organizing activities, not to mention breaking some bodies as well.

The demise of the Black Legion did nothing to dissolve racial polarization in Detroit. Blacks were still cooped up in ghettos smaller than their inhabitants' numbers could handle. The awful 1943 race riots that brought federal armed guards to Tigers games at Briggs Stadium served as a wake-up call, but the citizenry just kept hitting the snooze button until 1967, by which point the city's metrics were trending downward and would so until Detroit's bankruptcy in 2013.

Yeah, but at least we got baseball.

"Terror in the City of Champions" retails for \$26 and should be available in Detroit-area bookstores as well as online booksellers.

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