

Tigers Stripes

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D
Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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TRAMMELL AND MORRIS: PLAYERS FOR THE AGES

Rarely do we get to see any Tiger inducted into the Hall of Fame, much less two. That's what made July 29 such a great day to be a Tigers fan - Alan Trammell and Jack Morris were finally enshrined. *Tigers Stripes* asked three Society members to record their impressions. Without further ado:

Larry Hilliard: "Pat Kilroy and I had a chance meeting with Alan Trammell at Doubleday Field that I don't have any evidence of, other than Pat as a witness. Tram didn't want to be recognized and we obliged; Pat was the one who recognized him, he was dressed as a baseball player with his equipment bag, and had a 'C' on his cap, so no 'D.' But I think he was going to work out away from his adoring fans. Darrell Evans said he just met with Alan while he was away from the autograph table with Denny McLain."

Mark Slater: "Growing up as a little boy I dreamed of being the pitcher who won Game 7 of the World Series or the hitter who was the MVP of the Series. In the end, I did not have the talent to accomplish either of these feats. However, my attraction to the game of baseball never waned, only became stronger over the years. Mayo Smith's 1968 Tigers won the World Series on my 11th birthday on October 10, 1968.

"It seemed the heroes of that team could never be rivaled, then came the 1984 Tigers. Jack Morris set the stage for what was to come in 1984 when he pitched a no-hitter in the fourth game of the season. I fondly remember listening to Ernie Harwell as I was working that day and feeling the drama build with each passing inning. With the final out, the celebration began, and the celebrating continued as the Tigers achieved the famed 35-5 start, then reached the crescendo when Kirk Gibson hit the home run off Goose Gossage to seal the Game 5 victory and win the World Series.

"I traveled to Cooperstown with my wife to witness a moment in baseball history as these teammates were inducted together. It was striking to see the thousands of Tigers fans who made the pilgrimage to Cooperstown. It was exciting to visit the Hall and stand with other Tiger fans in awe of the plaque of Al Kaline, the last Tigers player inducted in 1980. Even more exciting was to see Kaline in person as he rode the first Ford F-150 in the parade on July 28.

"The next day the action moved outside the hall to a field adjacent to Clark Sports Center on the outskirts of town. Here is where the Field of Dreams came true. The stage for the induction ceremony, ironically, overlooked a cornfield, just like in the movie. From the stage, six new Hall of Famers gave inspirational speeches about their development from Little Leaguers to Hall of Famers. Morris and Trammell relayed their stories of growing up in the Tigers' farm system, then graduating to the big club and winning the 1984 World Series. A loud cheer from the loyal Tigers fans rang out when Trammell took the stage. He exclaimed, 'I hear you,' and the faithful went wild. They both spoke about their love for Detroit and the fans and they certainly made us Detroiters proud with the quality of their speeches.

"It was an honor to be able to attend the induction ceremony and create a memory this Tiger Fan will cherish forever!"

Steve Hicks: "It was a privilege to be a part of the second-largest crowd ever to see the Hall of Fame induction ceremony. Over 50,000 fans were in attendance to welcome Jim Thome, Chipper Jones, Vladimir Guerrero and Trevor Hoffman and our beloved pair of Detroit Tigers, Jack Morris and Alan Trammell.

"They each deserve the many accolades they have received over the years. Remembering the exploits of Trammell and Morris is a joy for Tigers fans everywhere. However, their greatness on the diamond pales in comparison to the pride both Morris and Trammell have for being long-time Tigers greats. At the induction ceremony each spoke fondly of joining the Tigers as youngsters in the 1970s and working hard to improve as ballplayers so that they could help the Tigers and the entire community of Detroit to win the World Series in 1984.

“It was also touching to see both men recognize the greatness of their teammate, Sweet Lou Whitaker. Both Trammell and Morris stated Whitaker should be in the Hall of Fame and thanked him for his outstanding contributions to the Tigers. Hopefully, Whitaker will join Trammell and Morris in the Hall someday.”

CENTER FIELD: COBB AND THE OTHERS -- By David Raglin

Center field was a position where we knew who the greatest was before we started. Ty Cobb was one of the greatest players in the history of the game, part of the first Hall of Fame class, and if the Hall of Fame had only 25 players, he'd still be in it. So, the interesting thing was the battle for second place. As we've been doing at other positions, let's show the Top 10 Tiger center fielders in a variety of categories:

Detroit Tiger Center Fielders Ranked in Games, Runs Created, Runs Created Per Game, and WAR

Rk	Tiger CF	G	Rk	Tiger CF	RC	Rk	Tiger CF	RC/G	Rk	Tiger CF	WAR
1	Ty Cobb	2806	1	Ty Cobb	2360	1	Ty Cobb	8.8	1	Ty Cobb	144.7
2	Mickey Stanley	1516	2	Chet Lemon	621	2	Barney McCosky	6.2	2	Chet Lemon	30.7
3	Chet Lemon	1203	3	Mickey Stanley	552	3	Curtis Granderson	6.2	3	Curtis Granderson	21.2
4	Ron LeFlore	787	4	Ron LeFlore	478	4	Johnny Groth	5.3	4	Austin Jackson	20.5
5	Hoot Evers	769	5	Curtis Granderson	454	5	Ron LeFlore	5.2	5	Mickey Stanley	17.3
6	Johnny Groth	737	6	Hoot Evers	431	6	Chet Lemon	5.2	6	Ron LeFlore	14.2
7	Doc Cramer	720	7	Barney McCosky	402	7	Austin Jackson	5.1	7	Jimmy Barrett	13.8
8	Curtis Granderson	674	8	Austin Jackson	390	8	Jimmy Barrett	4.9	8	Barney McCosky	13.1
9	Austin Jackson	670	9	Heinie Manush	366	9	Bill Bruton	4.7	9	Heinie Manush	12.4
10	Jo-Jo White	630	10	Johnny Groth	341	10	Jo-Jo White	4.4	10	Hoot Evers	12.1

So no surprise, our assumptions were correct: Cobb is the clear winner. In fact, he laps the field. He has played almost twice as many games as any other contender and has almost four times as many runs created. Looking at the wins above replacement category, he has more than 100 WAR more than the second-place finisher.

The real race for the best center fielder in Tigers history is for second place. Unlike most of the position races, the contenders are players whom we all know and remember. Mickey Stanley, a great center fielder probably best known for being a shortstop in the 1968 World Series, has the second-most games, but he was not an effective hitter. Even taking into account the fact that he played in an extreme pitcher's era, his offensive statistics were below average compared to his contemporaries.

Stanley has a surprisingly low WAR, but he demonstrates the problem with using a modern statistic like WAR to look at older players whose value is more in their defense. Baseball Reference WAR, which is what we use in this newsletter, has Stanley as an adequate center fielder in his prime and then as a below replacement center fielder after that (meaning that a player off the scrap heap would have been better in center than Stanley). That is certainly inconsistent with his reputation from that era and anything that we saw as Tigers fans. Defensive statistics are getting better with contemporary players because of the Statcast data but Stanley shows the problem with adapting those methods for players from the past.

Chet Lemon is an interesting case. I was a huge Chet Lemon fan during his heyday but I did not realize how good he really was. Lemon makes a very good case to be the runner-up to Cobb. Lemon is third in games played and second in runs created, which shows longevity at a high level, and is in the middle of a cluster of other hitters battling for fourth place in runs created per game -- a stat that measures the level that he reached. In terms of defense, Lemon was considered a very good center fielder too, a critical element in the pasture called center field in Tiger Stadium. As I said above, I am reluctant to rely too much on WAR when comparing historical players for which advanced defensive stats are not available, but Lemon does have some seasons with a great defensive WAR and his overall WAR is well in front of everybody else but Cobb.

Third place is pretty hard, and you can make a case for several players. I'd pick Curtis Granderson, who had a high level of performance but only played regularly for four-and-a-third seasons for the Tigers. You could easily say Mickey Stanley for his longevity, giving him mega bonus points for playing shortstop in the Series. Probably the biggest surprise on the list for me was Austin Jackson, Granderson's replacement in center field who played almost the same number of games for Detroit as the Grandy Man. Jackson was a good player, but I never would have guessed his WAR for the Tigers was that close to Granderson's. That was in large part because WAR judged Jackson to be the superior defensive player. I'm willing to give WAR more benefit of the doubt here since we are dealing in both cases with modern players for whom we have more stats. Jackson was also a better hitter, looking back, than I had thought. Jackson's best season at the plate was 2012, when he hit .300 with a .377 on-base percentage and a .479 slugging percentage. That was a good year to have a good year since the Tigers won the Central by only three games and went on to the World Series.

The other player I want to give a shout-out for is Barney McCosky. McCosky played center field regularly for the Tigers from 1939 to 1942, his first four season in the majors. McCosky received MVP votes in each of those seasons and led the league in hits and triples in 1940, a year the Tigers won the pennant by a single game. McCosky served his country in World War II, which caused him to miss the 1943 to 1945 seasons. He came back in 1946 but in mid-May was traded to the Philadelphia Athletics for third baseman George Kell in a "needs" deal; the Tigers had a glut of outfielders but needed a third baseman. While the trade worked out great for the Tigers, gaining them their best third baseman and in my humble opinion, a great TV broadcaster, it's important to note they gave up a really good player to get Kell.

INOFFENSIVE OFFENSE – By David Raglin

The Tigers' high point of the season was on June 17, when after sweeping the White Sox they were 36-37, only two games out of first, with two games against the Reds and a three-game showdown against the Indians coming up. Unfortunately, they won no more games that month, going on a 11-game losing streak. Since then, through August 5, they have gone 11-17, a 66-96 pace for a full season. If we look a bit more at the 11-17 period, we'll see that the problem has been the offense. The Tigers have only given up 4.0 runs per game during that time, much better than the 4.5 league average. The problem has been the offense, which has scored only 3.4 runs per game. (For the whole season, the Tigers have scored 3.8 runs per game, second worst in the league, and allowed 4.5 runs per game, right at the league average.)

The only two regular Tigers hitters with a runs created per game mark above the league average during that period have been Niko Goodrum and Jose Iglesias:

Tiger Hitters Above Average, 27 Games From July 1 to August 4, 2018

Best Hitters	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
Goodrum	26	103	11	28	10	1	3	9	5	31	.272	.306	.476	.781	15	5.1
Iglesias	25	85	8	23	9	0	2	16	3	7	.271	.308	.447	.755	11	4.6

To contrast, the two hitters who had been carrying the team were Nick Castellanos and Jeimer Candelario, but over the same 27-game stretch they have struggled:

Tiger Hitters Struggling, 27 Games From July 1 to August 4, 2018

Hitters Down	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
Castellanos	26	101	15	21	5	1	3	9	9	29	.208	.279	.366	.646	10	3.2
Candelario	24	89	8	18	0	0	2	8	5	25	.202	.240	.270	.509	6	2.1

In fact, Candelario has not done well since returning from the disabled list in late May with a wrist ligament injury that might need offseason surgery, as shown on the next page.

Jeimer Candelario, Before and After His Trip to the Disabled List

Candelario	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
Thru May 10	37	147	21	40	12	3	5	16	18	38	.272	.359	.497	.856	26	6.1
May 25 on	58	206	28	41	5	0	9	24	24	63	.199	.291	.354	.646	21	3.2

TIGERS BOOKSHELF: “JOY IN TIGERTOWN” – Reviewed by David Raglin

The title of Mickey Lolich’s autobiography, “Joy in Tigertown,” comes from the famous ditty from the late 1960s, “Go Get ‘Em Tigers,” with the lyrics: “They’ll be joy in Tigertown, we’ll sing you songs, when the Bengals bring the pennant home where it belongs!” It is an appropriate title because this book is a joy to read.

I have to admit I am not the most unbiased reviewer here, as Mickey Lolich is my all-time favorite player. The corner of my “Tiger Room” at home is dedicated to Lolich memorabilia, and when scoring games, I circle the uniform number of anyone wearing Mickey’s 29.

That being said, this is a great book. I bought it June 1, the day it came out, and by June 3 I was done. (The only reason it took that long was that I would put it down in order to make it last longer.)

The best part of the book is that co-author and longtime Tigers beat write Tom Gage did a superb job of putting the words into Lolich’s voice. We had Lolich speak to us at the Society’s Annual Gathering in 2016, where he wowed us, and this book sounds just like Lolich did that day. It’s an honest book; he tells you how he feels about things.

I was concerned it would be full of stories we’ve heard time and time again, that there would be nothing new. Fortunately, that was not true. It begins not with the 1968 season or World Series, but with Lolich’s service in the National Guard during the Detroit riots of 1967 and the 1967 pennant race. After that story and a chapter on the 1968 regular season, Mickey alternates chapters telling his life story with chapters on each game of the 1968 World Series. In the 1967 chapter he talks about his 10-game losing streak, during which a policeman pulled him over but after finding out who he was declined to give him a ticket, stating that things were already tough enough for him. He turned around his season in August, and went 8-1 the rest of the way, but it was not enough as they lost the pennant by a game to the Boston Red Sox.

We even got new perspective on a couple of well-known Lolich stories. We all know Lolich was a natural right-hander who became a lefty pitcher after a motorcycle fell on his left shoulder when he was a little kid, but I did not know that his parents actually tied his right arm behind his back to force him to rehabilitate his left arm. We Lolich fans know how he retired at the age of 21 because of a disagreement with the Tigers organization and only returned to pro ball when he was allowed to pitch on loan with his hometown Portland Beavers, but I was not aware that the key to his success was Beavers pitching coach Gerry Staley.

We also find out why he chose the Tigers over the Yankees thanks to Johnny Pesky, why he initially missed first base on his World Series homer, why he would not throw at hitters, and why he and Jim Campbell had a falling out that lasted many years, among other tales. I’m not going to spill the beans, though; you’ll have to buy the book to read the stories!

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