

# Tigers Stripes

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 Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

September 2014

## A STUNNING MONTH – By David Raglin

Everything was looking pretty good. The Tigers started slowly after the All-Star Break, losing the first three games, but they had won four of five after that. When they went to bed on Thursday July 24, they were in first place by 7.5 games over the Kansas City Royals. The Royals did not look like a threat, hanging around the .500 mark all season, and their walk-off win on July 24 had inched them ahead of the Cleveland Indians. There was lots of angst with Tigers fans, as there seems to have been all year, but not about the division title. That seemed like a sure thing. Since that date, almost exactly a month ago, well, the table below tells the story:

### The Detroit Tigers and the Kansas City Royals, July 25-August 24, 2014

Date	Detroit				Kansas City				1st Pl	Comments
	Versus	Res	Score	Record	Versus	Res	Score	Record		
Start of period	----- 57-42				----- 51-50				Det 7.0	
Fri, Jul 25	at LA	L	1-2	57-43	Cle	W	6-4	52-50	Det 6.0	
Sat, Jul 26	at LA	L	0-4	57-44	Cle	W	7-5	53-50	Det 5.0	
Sun, Jul 27	at LA	L	1-2	57-45	Cle	L	3-10	53-51	Det 5.0	
Tue, Jul 29	Chi	L	4-11	57-46	Min	L	1-2	53-52	Det 5.0	
Wed, Jul 30	Chi	W	7-2	58-46	Min	W	3-2	54-52	Det 5.0	
Thu, Jul 31	Chi	L	4-7	58-47	Min	W	6-3	55-52	Det 4.0	Detroit gets Price while pen struggles
Fri, Aug 1	Col	W	4-2	59-47	at Oak	W	1-0	56-52	Det 4.0	
Sat, Aug 2	Col	W	11-5	60-47	at Oak	L	3-8	56-53	Det 5.0	
Sun, Aug 3	Col	W	4-0	61-47	at Oak	W	4-2	57-53	Det 5.0	
Mon, Aug 4	at NY	L	1-2	61-48	off-day	----	----	57-53	Det 4.5	
Tue, Aug 5	at NY	W	4-3 (12)	62-48	at Ari	W	12-2	58-53	Det 4.5	Price's first start
Wed, Aug 6	at NY	L	1-5	62-49	at Ari	W	4-3	59-53	Det 3.5	
Thu, Aug 7	at NY	L	0-1	62-50	at Ari	W	6-2	60-53	Det 2.5	
Fri, Aug 8	at Tor	W	5-4	63-50	SF	W	4-2	61-53	Det 2.5	Detroit bottom of ninth comeback
Sat, Aug 9	at Tor	L	2-3 (10)	63-51	SF	W	5-0	62-53	Det 1.5	Nathan blows save
Sun, Aug 10	at Tor	L	5-6 (19)	63-52	SF	W	7-4	63-53	Det 0.5	Detroit 5-0 lead, Joba blows save
Mon, Aug 11	at Pit	L	6-11	63-53	Oak	W	3-2	64-53	KC 0.5	Soria, Sanchez to DL, Verlander 1IP, hurt
Tue, Aug 12	at Pit	L	2-4	63-54	Oak	L	3-11	64-54	KC 0.5	
Wed, Aug 13	Pit	W	8-4	64-54	Oak	W	3-0	65-54	KC 0.5	Farmer's first start, hangs in there
Thu, Aug 14	Pit	W	5-2	65-54	Oak	W	7-3	66-54	KC 0.5	
Fri, Aug 15	Sea	L	2-7	65-55	at Min	W	6-5	67-54	KC 1.5	
Sat, Aug 16	Sea	W	4-2	66-55	at Min	L	1-4	67-55	KC 0.5	
Sun, Aug 17	Sea	L	1-8	66-56	at Min	W	12-6	68-55	KC 1.5	Ray struggles
Mon Aug 18	off-day	----	----	66-56	at Min	W	6-4	69-55	KC 2.0	
Tue, Aug 19	at TB	W	8-6 (11)	67-56	at Col	W	7-4	70-55	KC 2.0	
Wed, Aug 20	at TB	W	6-0	68-56	at Col	L	2-5	70-56	KC 1.0	
Thu, Aug 21	at TB	L	0-1	68-57	off-day	----	----	70-56	KC 1.5	
Fri, Aug 22	Min	L	6-20	68-58	at Tex	W	6-3	71-56	KC 2.5	Dreadful game, Romine pitches
Sat Aug 23 (1)	Min	L	4-12	68-59	at Tex	W	6-3	72-56	KC 3.0	Down 9-1 after 2
Sat Aug 23 (2)	Min	W	8-6	69-59	----	----	----	72-56	KC 3.0	Verlander returns, hangs in there
Sun Aug 24	Min	W	13-4	69-60	at Tex	L	1-3	72-58	KC 2.0	
Total	Record: 13-17				Record: 21-7				KC 9.0	

What happened? The chart shows the Tigers have struggled, going 13-17 in the last month, while the Royals have been on fire, going 21-7. What were the key moments and reasons for the big fall? That will be the focus of this article.

One significant day was Thursday, July 31. The big news that day was, of course, the acquisition of David Price from the Tampa Bay Rays. However, while the Tigers were finishing and announcing the big trade, few noticed that the Tigers lost 7-4 to the White Sox, with the bullpen giving up three runs in the last three innings to help the Sox break a 4-4 tie. That was a sign of things to come.

I have to admit I had not even noticed the Royals had moved to within four games of the Tigers, and if I had, I would have not cared. However, what we did not know is that Kansas City was starting a 17-3 run.

Probably the worst of it was from Saturday, August 9, to Monday, August 11. On Friday night, the Tigers had staged a dramatic ninth-inning comeback to beat Toronto, although Joe Nathan made it far too interesting in the bottom of the ninth. Nathan was not so lucky on Saturday. He blew that save and Joaquin Soria bailed him out, but the Tigers lost it in 10. We were worried when Soria came out of the game with an injury, but we were not prepared for what followed. After the game, we found out that both Soria and Anibal Sanchez (who'd struggled on Friday) were both hurt.

Sunday, the Tigers blew a 5-0 lead and Joba Chamberlain blew the save. The game eventually went 19 innings, with the Tigers getting a loss while wearing out every possible pitcher. Monday, Justin Verlander lasted only one inning and we found out he had shoulder soreness. That meant Detroit had to pitch Robbie Ray and Buck Farmer (who had two starts above low-A ball), neither one who is a major league pitcher right now. That led to the 32 runs allowed in less than 24 hours in Minnesota.

The biggest risk going into the 2014 season for the Tigers was a lack of depth, and the risk was realized during this stretch. The Tigers had a killer rotation, but after trading Fister, there were no credible options. The bullpen was very risky entering the season, and there were no good options if the first wave of relievers failed. Here is the stat that drives that home: the Tigers have had 10 (!) pitchers make their major league debut this year (see how many you can name before reading ahead): Blaine Hardy, Robbie Ray, Justin Miller, Brad Smith, Pat McCoy, Corey Knebel, Buck Farmer, Kyle Lobstein, Drew VerHagen, and Melvin Mercedes.

Now that I've said all that, you are probably ready to pull out your hair. We try to be positive but we have to react to what has happened. However, we also have to not overreact. The Tigers are only two out as this is being written, after two straight wins in Minnesota, including a passable performance by Verlander. We also have to acknowledge that a big part of that is the Royals have been on fire, going 21-7 while the Tigers have a 13-17 record. I don't think the Royals are that good, and there are five weeks left in the season. I still expect the Tigers to win the division and make the playoffs. However, the difference now is we know it will be a fight. Now we need to mark our calendars for the two upcoming series against the Royals: Monday, September 8-Wednesday, September 10 in Detroit and Friday, September 19-Sunday, September 21 in Kansas City.

### **THE DAVID PRICE DEAL** – By David Raglin

A lot has been written about this trade, and I'm not going to rehash everything here. However there are a few points that I think are worthy of discussion.

I was at the Society of American Baseball Research (SABR) annual national convention in Houston at the trading deadline. If you can imagine it, 500 die-hard baseball fans and researchers; there is probably no better place to be when all of this was coming down. While trying to watch presentations and panels, I was continually checking Twitter for the latest news. When the deal came down, I had many people who know I was a Tigers fan (my shirt may have given it away) coming up to me to congratulate the Tigers on getting Price. It certainly looked good; getting one of the top starters in the game for a guy considered to be a third or fourth starter, an outfielder, and a prospect who might be good in four or five years.

However, it was a product of both the state of the Tigers and the peculiarities of this year's trading deadline. The value of prospects had been driven up so high that it was almost impossible to get prospects in a deal. That was OK for the Tigers, since the Detroit farm system is very thin and there were not good enough prospects to get top major league talent. Instead, both the Tigers and the A's traded primarily major league talent to get the pieces they thought they needed.

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The downside of that, though, is that trading major league talent weakens the current team. By trading Austin Jackson, they were betting everything that both Rajai Davis and J.D. Martinez would continue to hit well. Since he took over for Jackson, Davis has hit only .236 with one home run and eight runs batted in. His on-base percentage, batting leadoff until being bumped to the #9 slot, is only .261. Martinez has been better, but not great with three home runs, ten runs batted in and a .258 average.

This trade also is an implicit indictment of the Doug Fister deal, in that it is basically an undoing of Fister trade. In the Fister deal, the Tigers traded a star pitcher who can be a free agent after the 2015 season, and acquiring a package headlined by a young lefthanded starter who was projected to be a #3 or #4 starter when ready. The Price deal saw the opposite; the Tigers acquiring the star pitcher who can be a free agent after the 2015 season and trading the young lefthander who looks like he will be a third or fourth starter. Price is better than Fister, certainly, but Smyly is better than Ray, and Austin Jackson better than Ian Krol and Steve Lombardozzi. (On Ray, it is not fair to judge him on his 2014 season in Detroit. Nobody thought he was ready to start in the majors this year. Still, the top-end projection for Ray is probably about a Drew Smyly-level pitcher.)

It is not bad that the Tigers were willing to undo the Fister trade with the Price trade. We would not want the front office to not react to the changing conditions. Last winter, they thought they could afford to trade Fister, with the idea that Smyly was ready to step in and that Ray had a lot of potential. Now, they felt they needed the top-line starter, and they made a trade that got almost universal approval, from the statheads to the old-time baseball guys.

Price has one big advantage over both Smyly and Fister that we are sure the Tigers looked at. Price leads the majors with 7.44 innings pitched per start. That is especially important this season given the Tigers' woeful bullpen.

**Leaders in Innings Pitched Per Start, 2014, 120 or More Innings, Through August 24, 2014**

Starter	Team	St	IP	IP/St	Starter	Team	St	IP	IP/St
<b>David Price</b>	<b>TB/DET</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>201.1</b>	<b>7.46</b>	Hisashi Iwakuma	Sea	22	149.1	6.79
Clayton Kershaw	LAD	21	153.1	7.30	Julio Teheran	Atl	27	182.2	6.77
Masahiro Tanaka	NYN	18	129.1	7.19	Chris Sale	CHW	21	142.0	6.76
Johnny Cueto	Cin	27	192.2	7.14	<b>Max Scherzer</b>	<b>DET</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>181.0</b>	<b>6.70</b>
Felix Hernandez	Sea	27	191.0	7.07	Bartolo Colon	NYM	25	167.1	6.69
Adam Wainwright	StL	26	182.0	7.00	Mike Leake	Cin	27	179.1	6.64
Corey Kluber	Cle	27	186.1	6.90	<b>Rick Porcello</b>	<b>DET</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>165.1</b>	<b>6.61</b>
Dallas Keuchel	Hou	24	164.1	6.85	James Shields	KC	27	178.1	6.60
Jon Lester	Bos/Oak	26	177.2	6.83	Sonny Gray	Oak	26	171.0	6.58
Cole Hamels	Phi	23	156.1	6.80	<b>Doug Fister</b>	<b>Was</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>124.2</b>	<b>6.56</b>

As the table shows, there are only six other pitchers that are even within a half-inning per start of Price. Two other Tigers starters are on the list, Max Scherzer and Rick Porcello. Doug Fister certainly is not a slacker, coming in at #20 in the majors at 6.56 inning per start, but that is still almost an inning less per start (and an inning for the bullpen) than Price. (To be fair, Fister's Nationals have a great, deep bullpen, and in the National League, managers sometimes have to hit for their pitchers.) Drew Smyly, to contrast, has only averaged 5.79 innings per start, about five outs less per game than Price.

The Tigers have already taken advantage of Price's durability; he has gone eight innings in three of his Detroit starts, and only coming out after six in the other one because he was hit on the knee with a line drive. Probably the most memorable of those was his performance in his old ballpark against his own team on August 21. An error put a runner on first in the first inning and the next batter hit a triple. It was the last baserunner Price allowed, but it went for naught when the Tigers could not score. It was only the fifth time in history that a

pitcher pitched a complete game, allowed only one hit and two or fewer baserunners, and lost the game. (For a list of the others, go to <http://www.baseball-reference.com/play-index/share.cgi?id=LJWZI>)

**TV STARS** – By David Raglin

It’s a mantra we are sick of hearing about: Baseball is losing popularity, and the low television ratings prove it. Of course, with all of the other entertainment options, all television ratings are down, but it is true that marquee events like the All-Star Game and the World Series are certainly dwarfed by NFL ratings, and can be in the range of NBA ratings.

However, that shows a major misconception on how people follow baseball. For football and basketball, fans tend to follow certain teams nationally, like the Dallas Cowboys and Los Angeles Lakers. Teams like the New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox, and L.A. Dodgers have fans all over the country, but it’s not the same. Baseball is much more a local sport. Fans tend to follow the local teams more and the national teams less.

Recently, Maury Brown, a writer for Forbes who does an excellent job covering the sports business world, had a piece on local baseball ratings. You can find it by Googling “Forbes Maury Brown” or following this link: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/maurybrown/2014/08/05/mlb-telecasts-on-regional-sports-networks-dominate-prime-time-television/>. He looked at the prime-time television ratings from Nielsen from March 31 to July 24, 2014, in 27 markets. (Toronto was excluded because only American cities are counted, and the Dodgers and Astros were excluded because cable carriage battles mean that they are seen in few homes in their market.) He found 12 major league teams had the highest rating in prime time in their home markets during that time period. That includes not just cable shows but network television, too. The highest rating was posted by our Detroit Tigers, with 8.36 percent of television homes in the Detroit market tuned in to the Tigers on Fox Sports Detroit.

The table below shows the top five ratings, the seven other teams who were #1 in their market, and the top five audiences. The Yankees had by far the biggest audience -- not a shock given their market size -- but the Tigers were #2, beating out the other team in the New York market as well as the ever-popular Red Sox.

This shows that Tiger fans always care. (Where have I heard that before?)

**Prime Time Television Ratings, Major League Baseball Teams, March 31-July 24, 2014**

Market	Rating	Other Teams Who Were #1 in Their Market		Market	Audience
<b>Detroit</b>	<b>8.36</b>	Milwaukee	Boston	NY Yankees	251,000
St. Louis	7.56	Baltimore	San Francisco	<b>Detroit</b>	<b>156,000</b>
Pittsburgh	7.56	Kansas City	Arizona (Phoenix)	NY Mets	143,000
Cincinnati	7.01	Seattle		Boston	137,000
Cleveland	6.73			San Francisco	122,000

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