

Tigers Stripes

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Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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POSTMORTEM ON A PAINFUL SEASON – By David Raglin

It was spring, the flowers were blooming, and Tigers fans were optimistic that 2015 would be the year. There were a lot of concerns going into the season but we thought that the team would be a contender. Instead, the Tigers ended the season 74-87, in last place in the American League Central Division, 20.5 games behind the division-winning Kansas City Royals. The season began with Dave Dombrowski entering his 14th year with the Tigers and ended up with Dombrowski in Boston and Al Avila the new general manager. It was the seventh last-place finish and 14th losing season for the Tigers in the 23 season that the Ilitch family has owned the team. The team scored fewer runs than in any season since the infamous 2003 team. It allowed more runs than any Tiger team since the 2008 season, which also started with high hopes and ended with just about the same record. It was a long summer.

This month in *Tigers Stripes*, we will focus on what happened and the general changes that are needed to return the Tigers to contender status, focusing on the bad and the good from 2015 and how it relates to 2016. There is no doubt that owner Mike Ilitch will be pushing the management to win in 2016. It was rumored that one reason Dombrowski was fired is that he was in favor of trading upcoming free agents while Avila favored a pennant push. However, a lot will have to happen for that to be a reality next year. Next month, we will look at more specific options the Tigers might have, mainly in the free agent market, to improve the team in 2016.

BEFORE AND AFTER – By David Raglin

The team was 49-52, 12.5 games out in third place the division, and 3.5 games out in sixth place in the wild card on July 30 when the team pulled the plug and traded David Price, Joakim Soria and Yoenis Cespedes. While all of those players were destined to be free agents and might not be back with the Tigers, it did open up some holes. The team also gave some young players a chance to play over the last two months, such as Daniel Norris, Matt Boyd and Tyler Collins. The effect was pretty dramatic on the team's record:

The 2015 Detroit Tigers Before and After the Trades

Period	Games	Runs For	Runs Against	RF/G	RA/G	Record	Proj Record
Before: Opening Day-July 29	101	439	480	4.35	4.75	49-52	79-83
After: July 30-End of Season	60	243	323	4.05	5.38	25-35	67-95
Total 2015 Season	161	682	803	4.24	4.98	74-87	74-88

The Tigers scored about a third of a run less per game after the trades and allowed about three-quarters of a run more. Much of the pitching dropoff was the loss of Price and Anibal Sanchez (to injury) in the rotation, despite the comeback of Justin Verlander. Before the trades they were about a .500 club. Afterwards, they were on a pace to lose nearly 100 games. This is important because this is the starting point for the 2016 club.

#1 GOOD: JUSTIN VERLANDER -- By David Raglin

What a comeback over the second half of the 2015 season. Some people (ahem, of, me included) had given up on the possibility of him being a good starter in 2015. To be fair to me and the others, he did not look good and his stats were awful. However, Justin Verlander showed us why he has been one of the best starters (maybe the best in the American League) in his career. Here are his before-and-after stats:

Justin Verlander: Back to Being Verlander

Date	G	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR	W	L	ERA	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS
Jun 13 to Jul 19, 2015	6	34.0	39	26	25	12	22	8	0	3	6.62	0.289	0.349	0.511	0.860
Jul 24 to Oct 3, 2015	14	99.3	74	30	25	20	91	5	5	5	2.27	0.207	0.249	0.299	0.548

The difference is so great, it’s hard to believe we are talking the same pitcher within the same half of the season. We usually don’t give stats like batting average, on-base percentage, and slugging percentage for pitchers because the traditional pitching stats cover their performance well. We did it this time, though, to show how dramatic the difference was.

Verlander kept saying how close he was to putting it together when he was pitching poorly, and the stats do bear that out to an extent. His first six starts consisted of three OK games and three dreadful ones, and in only one of the OK games did he strike out more than he walked. In the last 14 starts, he struck out three more batters than he walked in all but one start (in that one, he struck out two more than he walked). Fangraphs.com reports his fastball has lost some speed, but it seems to have more movement, especially up. However, the upward movement has not led to an excess of home runs, as the five home runs allowed and .299 slugging percentage in the last 14 starts attest.

We don’t have room to go over the other good things in this issue, but look for pieces on them in upcoming issues of *Tigers Stripes*: #2—J.D. Martinez showing that 2014 was not a fluke by a long shot, #3—Nick Castellanos improves at the plate and in the field, and #4—James McCann establishes himself as the catcher of the future.

#1 BAD: STARTING PITCHING – By David Raglin

When we talk about the bad in 2016, we have to start with the pitching. As you can see from the table above, the Tigers allowed 5.02 runs per game. That was by far the most in the league. Only two teams were even within a half a run of that (Boston, 4.66, and Texas, 4.54). The bullpen got most of the blame since there were many dramatic breakdowns, especially when the club was still contending, but the bigger problem is the rotation. Here are the ERA and games started by Tigers pitchers (not including reliever Alex Wilson, who started a “bullpen game”). The ones in bold are who I speculate could be contenders for a rotation spot to start the season if there are no additions.

Tigers 2015 Starters, with ERA and Games Started

Starter	ERA	GS	Starter	ERA	GS
Price	2.53	21	Lobstein	5.94	11
Verlander	3.38	20	Wolf	6.42	7
Norris	3.75	8	Boyd	6.57	10
Ryan	4.55	6	Greene	6.88	16
Sanchez	4.99	25	Farmer	7.36	5

Wow, you can see how much the Tigers missed David Price. More on Justin Verlander’s great comeback now, but he is the only solid, healthy guy slated for the 2016 rotation. Norris could be good but is young and showed inconsistency this year. Boyd has some potential but is more likely a back-of-the-rotation guy. The others are fillers that would be considered only on a team with a bad rotation. What that means is that the Tigers probably need to pick up at least two starters this offseason if they hope to contend in 2016.

There are other bad things that we do not have room for in this issue, but they would include: #2—The bullpen (of course), #3—Victor Martinez’s injuries, #4—The lack of left-handed hitting and a solid-hitting center fielder. The other thing that can’t happen again if the Tigers are to contend is Miguel Cabrera can’t be hurt for a significant part of the season.

IT'S KING TIGER TIME! – By Mark Pattison

Now that the 2015 season is over -- prematurely, given how the Tigers have performed the rest of this decade – it's time to vote for King Tiger 2015. Before you harrumph off, grumbling that nobody's worthy, keep in mind that the Society has been selecting winners since it resurrected the award in 2004, when Detroit won just 71 games. It also found winners in 2005, a 70-win season, and 2008, a 74 win season.

Remember when voting that King Tiger is not meant to be the “Player of the Year” or the “MVP.” There are other awards for that. It is meant to be the player who, based on his accomplishments on the field, in the clubhouse, and with the public, is the person you feel epitomizes being a Detroit Tiger.

We'll keep the contest open through the Thanksgiving weekend. Voting for the award will close at 11:59 p.m. EST Saturday, Nov. 28. There are two ways to vote: by email at pattison_mark@hotmail.com, or by postal mail by writing to Mark Pattison, 1221 Floral St. NW, Washington, DC 20012. If emailing, please put "King Tiger" in the subject line. We'll name the winner in the December issue of *Tigers Stripes*, and make the award before a home game during the Society's annual Spring Training Trip (FYI, we have very tentatively scheduled the 2016 trip for March 19-26 in beautiful Lakeland, Fla., but that could change based on the schedule of games.).

The basic rules are these: You can vote only one time (this ain't the All-Star Game), and for only one player – no split votes. One vote per household. So if you've got an idea about who you want as King Tiger and your spouse has a different idea, either come to an agreement before you vote, or buy your loved one a separate membership as an early Halloween present (that's \$20 per year, folks, to Mayo Smith Society, PO Box 119, Northville, MI 48167). Feel free to say why you made the choice you did; we'll excerpt some of your comments when we announce the winner – even if your vote wasn't for the winner.

We're not going try to influence the vote in *Stripes* by hinting at names or accomplishments. Instead, following is an alphabetical list of every player who took part in a game for the Tigers this season -- just in case you might have forgotten someone; hey, it's possible, with 47 fellows having donned the Old English "D."

Presenting the candidates: Al Alburquerque, Alex Avila, Matt Boyd, Miguel Cabrera, Nick Castellanos, Yoenis Cespedes, Joba Chamberlain, Tyler Collins, Rajai Davis, Buck Farmer, Neftali Feliz, Jeff Ferrell, Daniel Fields, Tom Gorzelanny, Anthony Gose, Shane Greene, Blaine Hardy, Bryan Holaday, Jose Iglesias, Ian Kinsler, Guido Knudson, Marc Krauss, Ian Krol, Kyle Lobstein, Dixon Machado, Jefry Marte, J.D. Martinez, Victor Martinez, James McCann, Steven Moya, Joe Nathan, Angel Nesbitt, Daniel Norris, Hernan Perez, David Price, Andrew Romine, Bruce Rondon, Kyle Ryan, Anibal Sanchez, Alfredo Simon, Joakim Soria, Jose Valdez, Drew VerHagen, Justin Verlander, Alex Wilson, Josh Wilson, Randy Wolf.

Now it's time to do your civic duty and vote!

TIGERS BOOKSHELF: “DETROIT THE UNCONQUERABLE” – reviewed by Mark Pattison

OK, so the Tigers won't be going to the World Series this year. We can still celebrate the milestone 80th anniversary of the first Tigers team to win the Fall Classic, the 1935 club.

That's the aim of “Detroit the Unconquerable: The 1935 World Champion Tigers,” edited by Society member Scott Ferkovich. (You may remember Ferkovich and an original Society member, Scott Dominiak, talking about the book at this year's Annual Gathering.) Ferkovich followed in the footsteps of Society VP David Raglin and myself in editing the first “bio-book” NOT about the Boston Red Sox, “Sock It to 'Em Tigers,” and – still available through the order form on the back page of this issue of *Stripes* – its follow-up, “Detroit Tigers 1984: What a Start! What a Finish!”

The effort of Ferkovich and his stable of writers and editors is tougher in one key sense than what Dave and I encountered. In most cases, there was plentiful source material, and most of our subjects were alive if the historical record needed to be fleshed out. But in the 1935 Tigers' case, all the players and dead (Elden Auker was the last of them to die, in 2006), and all of the writers who wrote about them are dead, too – and, in some cases, so are their newspapers.

While some online research tools, especially Paper of Record, can be helpful in extruding details about a player's life and career, writing biographical profiles of players is still not the easiest thing to do when you've

got a real job and you know from the outset you're going to make zero money; Dave and I did, and we have the lack of royalty checks to prove it.

That said, there are still plenty of compelling reasons to get "Detroit the Unconquerable." While the team boasts four eventual Hall of Famers in Hank Greenberg, Charlie Gehringer, Mickey Cochrane and Goose Goslin, no team wins it all solely on the strength of its superstars. There are fascinating tales to be read about the stars and non-stars alike.

Too few people remember, even today, Billy Rogell's second life as a Detroit city councilman which lasted longer than his pro baseball career. Too few know of the cautionary tales of Tommy Bridges and Clyde Hatter, whose battles with the bottle led to a premature demise for them both. Too few recognize the fact that Goslin was one of the best fielding left fielders of his time until he spied a couple of high school track-and-field types one afternoon and started throwing the shotput like a baseball – with disastrous results the next day and the remainder of his career. Or that Hugh "Knockout" Shelley got into two scraps with a fellow outfielder on his minor league team over a mis-called fly ball – one on the field, and later in the dugout. The teammate? None other former Dodgers General Manager Al Campanis. Another colorful figure on the team was Gee Walker, a fan favorite who was, to put it mildly, a character.

In the interest of full disclosure, you'll find my name on the book as a contributing editor. I, along with Dave, gave advice to Ferkovich on how to proceed with the project. Dave wrote the piece on outfielder Gee Walker, and I also did the first draft proofreading of a handful of articles, but never saw the finished product until the book showed up in my mailbox. Even though Ferkovich used much of the same cast of characters as we did in proofreading and fact-checking, two whoppers got through: The Jewish holiday that Greenberg sat out for the only game he (and the entire Detroit infield) missed in 1934 was Yom Kippur, not Rosh Hashanah. And the grandson of Ray Hayworth (the last living teammate of Ty Cobb), J.D. Hayworth, is mentioned as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. But J.D. is now in his third term out of Congress when he bit off more than he could chew in challenging Sen. John McCain in the Republican primary in 2010. (He's no relation, by the way, to J.D. Martinez.)

"Detroit the Unconquerable" is available through both the Society for American Baseball Research (www.sabr.org) and amazon.com. You can also purchase it as an e-book. It'll make great between-pitches and between-innings reading during the postseason.

SHORT STRIPES

► Miguel Cabrera won his fourth batting crown in five years. He may be a big name in baseball, but he had some encouragement in his quest for the batting crown by a worldwide sporting hero: Pele. On September 3, Pele tweeted, "Good luck tonight to my brother @miguelCabrera in your pursuit for the batting crown!" Miggy tweeted back, "thank you very much my friend, for me it is an honor that a legend as you watch for me!!!! Thank you Hermano."

► Our congratulations to Mike Hessman, who broke the minor-league home run record with season with Detroit's AAA farm club, the Toledo Mud Hens. He finished with 433 minor league homers, plus seven in Asia. Hessman also hit nine of his 14 big league circuit clouts during separate call-ups to Detroit in 2007 and '08.

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For **Detroit Tigers 1984: What a Start! What a Finish!** (\$20) and **Detroit Tigers Lists and More** (\$10), autographed by authors David Raglin and Mark Pattison, send to:

Mark Pattison, 1221 Floral St. NW,
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