

# Tigers Stripes

The Newsletter of the  
  
Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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## FRUSTRATION – By David Raglin

We like to be positive, and there is a lot about the 2016 to be positive about. Justin Verlander is a Cy Young candidate again, Michael Fulmer looks like he will be Rookie of the Year (an award Verlander won 10 years ago) and maybe ERA champion, Nick Castellanos has had a breakout season at the plate, Ian Kinsler quietly is continuing to be one of the best players in the game, Miggy is Miggy, and Francisco Rodriguez has plugged a big hole the Tigers have had for years. Unfortunately, this has also been a frustrating season. Some of it is the play of individual players like big free-agent signings Jordan Zimmerman and Justin Upton which has not lived up to expectations, the back of the starting rotation, and some of the relievers. The Tigers have scored 668 runs and allowed 671 runs (both 4.5 runs per game, just about the league average), so they have actually scored and allowed about the same number of runs.

In this issue, we will focus on the pitching a bit, but also look at some of the specific reasons that Tigers fans may have been feeling frustrated. Hopefully by the time you read this, the Tigers will have gone on a hot streak and will be positioning themselves for a wild card spot. While they do have four against Cleveland, they are in Detroit, and their other opponents include the two worst teams in baseball (Minnesota and Atlanta), as well as Kansas City. The good news about the wild card is they will literally have an ace up their sleeve in Justin Verlander.

## PITCH CHECK -- By David Raglin

We've focused a lot of our discussion this season on the hitting, so this issue we will look more at the pitching. We are used to the familiar pitching stats, but especially for relievers, stats like ERA can be deceiving. We are used to looking at hitters' lines, so let's look at the pitchers the same way, as the hitting line against them, calculating stats like runs created and runs created per game. The table presents the data for all pitchers with at least 100 at-bats against them this year.

**Hitting Lines Against Tigers Pitchers, 2016 Season**

Tigers Pitcher	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	*RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS	RC	RC/G
Bruce Rondon	111	11	22	2	0	4	11	10	38	.198	.276	.324	.601	9	2.7
Justin Verlander	755	78	157	35	4	28	75	53	223	.208	.264	.376	.640	73	3.2
Francisco Rodriguez	194	19	41	9	1	5	18	20	46	.211	.284	.345	.630	19	3.2
Michael Fulmer	546	53	122	25	1	16	51	39	120	.223	.285	.361	.646	54	3.3
Shane Greene	205	34	50	8	1	3	33	21	55	.244	.323	.337	.660	21	3.5
Kyle Ryan	195	21	48	8	4	2	20	15	33	.246	.308	.359	.667	21	3.7
Alex Wilson	245	22	61	17	2	3	21	20	48	.249	.303	.371	.674	28	3.9
Justin Wilson	218	28	59	6	3	5	27	15	61	.271	.321	.394	.715	28	4.5
Matt Boyd	345	46	89	14	2	15	44	28	75	.258	.318	.441	.759	47	4.7
Jordan Zimmermann	390	60	111	22	7	13	57	23	60	.285	.324	.477	.801	60	5.5
Daniel Norris	210	23	59	12	2	8	22	17	51	.281	.333	.471	.805	33	5.6
Anibal Sanchez	574	104	165	24	2	27	100	52	128	.287	.349	.477	.826	96	6.0
Mark Lowe	186	39	55	11	3	12	37	19	44	.296	.354	.581	.934	37	7.3
Mike Pelfrey	473	74	157	22	3	14	71	46	53	.332	.394	.480	.874	90	7.3

## Tigers Stripes – October 2016 – Page 2

\* Baseball Reference does not give RBIs against pitchers, but I wanted to show RBIs since we are used to seeing them in a hitter's line. The approximated RBIs here are the runs scored multiplied by .9547, the ratio of RBIs/R on average in the American League this year.

Along with Verlander, Rodriguez and Fulmer, Bruce Rondon, Shane Greene, Kyle Ryan and Alex Wilson actually look pretty good (in other words, bad hitter's lines), and Justin Wilson and Matt Boyd have been about league average (4.5 and 4.7 runs created per game.) Rondon's line, in particular, looks especially good (bad?), with a sub-.200 average and an OPS of around .600. It's had to score runs off Justin Verlander when teams are hitting only .208 with a .276 on-base percentage off him and about 30 percent of at-bats ending in a strikeout, even with 28 home runs allowed in 755 at-bats (about a season-and-a-half for a regular hitter.) Greene's hitter's line, with 3.5 runs created per game, is the one that is in most contrast with his ERA of 5.50, which deserves a little detective work. Greene has allowed multiple runs in six of his 41 relief appearances, including three runs three times and four runs once. It seems that when he is bad, he is very bad, and the hits he allows are more likely to lead to runs because he just does not have it that day (suggesting to manager Brad Ausmus that if he is getting hit to get him out of the game as soon as possible.)

The other pitchers have not done well. The one big surprise on the list is Daniel Norris, who has a decent 3.81 ERA. His problems have been allowing a moderately high batting average and eight home runs in 210 at bats. However, of the eight home runs, six have been solo shots and two with one man on, which means they have not cost him that many runs. The other pitcher who looks worse here than his ERA would have predicted is Mike Pelfrey. Yes, he has pitched poorly but his ERA is only 5.00, nowhere near the 7.3 runs created per game his hitters line suggests. He has allowed a .332 batting average (no surprise given that he has allowed 157 hits in 117.0 innings, the same number of hits that Verlander has allowed, but in about half the innings.) Mark Lowe's problem has been the long ball, with 12 home runs allowed in 186 at-bats, leading to a .581 slugging percentage against him. Anibal Sanchez has had 574 at-bats against him, about what a regular hitter will get in a season, so if we look at his line we see a pretty good hitter (unfortunately for the Tigers.)

### **STREAKINESS** -- By David Raglin

It seems like to me that the Tigers have been very streaky this season. That can be frustrating; think of the number of times it seems like the Tigers have gotten it all together and are winning for a while before they turn around and go through a rough patch. I decided to see if they have been streaky by counting the number of times the Tigers' result was different than the result of the game before. This season, the Tigers' result, win or loss, has been the same as the day before 84 times. That sounds like a lot, and another thing we've noticed is the Tigers seem to beat the teams lower in the standings a lot and struggle against winning teams. That seems to be true: The Tigers are 36-50 against teams that are .500 or better as of September 17, and 42-20 against teams with a losing record as of that date.

However, those stats do not mean anything without context, so I did the same calculation for the six American League teams within three games of them. (I picked those teams because, of course, the farther a team is from .500 the more likely they will have streaks.) The results are in the table below.

### **Selected American League Teams Against Winning and Losing Teams, 2016**

AL Team	Streaks	Record Against Winning Teams			Record Against Losing Teams		
		W	L	+/- .500	W	L	+/- .500
Detroit	84	37	50	-13	42	20	22
Baltimore	78	49	48	1	33	19	14
Kansas City	77	38	48	-10	37	25	12
Houston	75	40	51	-11	38	19	19
Seattle	75	42	46	-4	36	24	12
New York	73	43	49	-6	34	22	12
Toronto	70	50	40	10	31	27	4

Among these seven AL opponents, the Tigers have the most streaks, games where the result was the same as the game before. The Tigers also are the most games below .500 against winning teams and the most games above .500 against losing teams. Certainly, Detroit’s record against Cleveland, 1-13, is a big part of that; if it was not for the Indians, the Tigers would be almost .500 against good teams. (Houston has a similar problem, they have gone 4-15 versus division-leading Texas.) On the good side, they have dominated the two weak teams in their division, Chicago and Minnesota, at a 24-11 pace, which is what teams are supposed to do.

**SLOW STARTS** – By David Raglin

There is another reason Tigers fans may be more frustrated than the team’s record would suggest. The table below shows their record after one inning, two innings, etc. See if you can spot a trend:

**2016 Tigers Record After Each Inning and Runs Scored and Allowed by Inning**

Inning	Ahead	Behind	Tied	+/-	RF	RA	RF/9Inn	RA/9Inn	AL Average
1 <sup>st</sup> Inning	28	38	83	-10	70	83	4.23	5.01	5.05
2 <sup>nd</sup> Inning	45	57	47	-12	70	70	4.23	4.23	4.34
3 <sup>rd</sup> Inning	53	58	38	-5	65	63	3.93	3.81	4.71
4 <sup>th</sup> Inning	60	61	28	-1	68	85	4.11	5.13	4.77
5 <sup>th</sup> Inning	64	68	17	-4	88	78	5.32	4.71	4.96
6 <sup>th</sup> Inning	65	64	20	1	91	70	5.50	4.23	4.73
7 <sup>th</sup> Inning	70	64	15	6	94	84	5.68	5.11	4.48
8 <sup>th</sup> Inning	70	63	15	7	65	93	3.95	5.66	4.43
9 <sup>th</sup> Inning	73	66	9	7	58	44	4.66	3.36	4.07
Extra Innings	79	70	0	9	8	6	3.13	2.35	3.26

We can see the Tigers are ten games below .500 after the first inning and steadily turn that around through the game. Let’s look at the runs scored and runs allowed columns to get some answers. The last column shows the average runs scored per inning for American League teams in 2016. More runs are scored in the first because that is the one inning the manager can set the lineup. The second is the lowest (until the ninth) because that is more often the lower hitters in the order. The number stays about the same until late in the game where the fireballing one-inning relievers suppress offense.

The Tigers’ offense, to contrast, has started slowly but picked it up in the middle innings, while the pitching has had a more typical trend until late in the game when the bullpen has been allowing quite a few runs than the league average.

Why is the offense showing that odd pattern? Things happen. You might think that 149 games are enough to have everything even out but that is not always true. Last year, the Tigers actually averaged 5.70 runs in the first inning and had a 47-31-83 record after one inning for a team that ended up 74-88.

I want to make it clear that I’m not saying there is anything wrong with this pattern. The reason I am featuring it here is that it is sort of interesting and it helps explain some of the frustration that Tigers fans have felt, frustration that arguably it not in proportion to the team’s record. This might not be a great team, but they have been in the pennant race all year, provided us quite a few memorable moments, and hopefully will go on another streak, this time a good one, and get into the wild card.

**SOCIETY BOOKSHELF: “TIGERS BY THE TALE”** – Review by Mark Pattison

Those ingenious folks at the Society for American Baseball Research keep coming up with new and varied ways to have its 6,000 or so members contribute to baseball history rather than being merely passive onlookers. First it was oral histories (I’m a vice-chair of that committee). Then the BioProject, which now has biographical profiles of 3,800 figures in baseball, the vast majority of them major leaguers. Now comes the

Games Project, in which members can write about notable games -- or, at least, games that were notable to them, as another 2,400 or so get played every year (sans playoffs).

One of the latest in this project is “Tigers by the Tale: Great Games at Michigan & Trumbull,” which chronicles a century-plus of Detroit Tigers (nee Creams) ballgames at The Corner. If you were to have saved your newspapers from great games -- and I know someone who does!-- or go to microfilm or microfiche reader at your neighborhood public library and gaze upon the game accounts written for the next day’s papers, you’ll find that these 1,500-word essays often have less detail than those long-gone game summaries.

One thing “Tigers by the Tale” does not lack, however, is context. Even the most astute of baseball writers cannot immediately assess the impact one particular game may have on a player, team, league or city. It also can’t get caught up too much in prelude due to the immediacy of that day’s game and the need to clear the decks for the next one.

“Tigers by the Tale,” edited by Society member Scott Ferkovich, takes 50 games from 104 seasons of baseball at Bennett Park, Navin Field, Briggs Stadium and Tiger Stadium. Given that there were roughly 8,000 games played in that century-plus, Ferkovich and his crew of chroniclers had to be mighty choosy. There are broad swaths of Tigers history that go unrecorded: nothing between the first AL major-league game and 1909, missing out on much of Sam Crawford’s brilliance and Ty Cobb’s early genius; between the first of Virgil Trucks’ 1952 no-hitters and the 1961 game when the Tigers overtook the New York Yankees to gain first place; between Mark Fidrych’s nationally televised disposing of the Yankees in 1976 and the 1984 contest simply known as “The Bergman Game.” I would have liked to read about the May 1982 game against Minnesota where Dave Rozema, in a bench-clearing brawl, king-fu’d his way to a season-ending knee injury.

Ah, but why focus on what a book lacks instead of what it includes? You do get glimpses of Ty Cobb’s brilliance. Baby boomers will relish reliving the exploits of Denny McLain and the 1968 Tigers. Generation X-ers will have their memories refreshed with the play of the 1984 and 1987 teams. (Disclosure: Dave Raglin wrote the article on the final game of the 1987 regular season.) Every diehard lover of Tiger Stadium will heave a resigned sigh as the book comes to a close with the Tigers stumbling their way into a new ballpark for the 21st century.

It’s good to know “Tigers by the Tale” doesn’t skimp on the early decades of the franchise -- or the games where the Tigers lost. And, just as with last month’s book review, “The 50 Greatest Players in Detroit Tigers History,” I applied the “Detroit Tigers Lists and More” test, checking the dates of the games included in the SABR book against the date index in the book co-authored by David Raglin and me. And only 36 dates are the same, which means the Ferkovich team did a fine job digging up historical chestnuts for the pleasure of Tigers fans.

Perhaps a second volume is in order, with the Tigers as road warriors, including the 21st century. How about Virgil Trucks’ second no-hitter of 1952? Game 7 of the ’68 Series? The September 1908 extra-inning darkness-called tie in Philadelphia that kept Detroit atop the AL? The 2006 playoff game in Noo Yawk delayed a day by rain and won by the Tigers? You can see where I’m going with this.

“Tigers by the Tale” retails for \$12.95 and can be ordered through amazon.com.

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