

Tigers Stripes

The Newsletter of the
D
Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

October 2018

END OF THE SEASON

The season has ended. It's always sad when a baseball season ends, but we have had some fun moments this year. We were going to start our look back at the season, and more importantly, a look at the future, this month, but as you can see, we have six pages of other interesting stories, including a look back at the 1968 season and Alan Trammell. So, we will spend time in October digesting the good and bad of this season and where the Tigers go from here and give it all to you next month!

BATTLE BEHIND THE PLATE – By David Raglin

We now move behind the plate in our quest to build the All-Tigers Team. This was not a particularly close race, as Bill Freehan easily ranks as the Tigers' greatest catcher. As you can see below, he heads up three of the four categories, and while he may not be as high in runs created per game, defined as an estimate of how many runs a team made up of entirely that player would score per game, we need to remember what a pitcher's era he played in.

Detroit Tigers Catchers Ranked in Games, Runs Created, Runs Created Per Game, and WAR

Rk	Tiger C	G	Rk	Tiger C	RC	Rk	Tiger C	RC/G	Rk	Tiger C	WAR
1	Bill Freehan	1774	1	Bill Freehan	866	1	Mickey Cochrane	7.4	1	Bill Freehan	44.8
2	Lance Parrish	1146	2	Lance Parrish	607	2	Mickey Tettleton	6.8	2	Lance Parrish	30.1
3	Oscar Stanage	1095	3	Mickey Tettleton	374	3	Pinky Hargrave	5.9	3	Johnny Bassler	19.5
4	Johnny Bassler	767	4	Johnny Bassler	343	4	Johnny Bassler	5.6	4	Mickey Tettleton	14.8
5	Alex Avila	760	5	Alex Avila	343	5	John Wockenfuss	5.3	5	Ivan Rodriguez	14.2
6	John Wockenfuss	677	6	Ivan Rodriguez	330	6	Chad Kreuter	5.0	6	Alex Avila	12.9
7	Ray Hayworth	658	7	Oscar Stanage	290	7	Alex Avila	5.0	7	Mickey Cochrane	11.4
8	Birdie Tebbetts	646	8	John Wockenfuss	283	8	Bill Freehan	4.9	8	Brad Ausmus	7.6
9	Ivan Rodriguez	611	9	Birdie Tebbetts	236	9	Ivan Rodriguez	4.9	9	John Wockenfuss	6.8
10	Mickey Tettleton	570	10	Ray Hayworth	222	10	Lance Parrish	4.9	10	Matt Nokes	6.4

Bill Freehan is beloved by Tiger fans and the 50th anniversary of the 1968 World Series champions has brought renewed attention to him, particularly his blocking of the plate and tag of Lou Brock in Game 5 of the World Series, and his memorable pop-up catch of the final out of the Series.

However, it is easy to forget what a great player Freehan was. He was clearly the dominant catcher of his era, making the AL All-Star team for 10 straight seasons (1964-1973) and starting seven of those game in a row (1966-1972). He received MVP votes in five seasons, including three top-10 finishes. In 1967, he finished third behind Triple Crown-winner Carl Yastrzemski and slugger Harmon Killebrew, receiving four second-place votes. The next year, he finished second in the MVP voting to Denny McLain, who was a unanimous winner. When I think of underrated Tigers, Freehan is right up there with Donie Bush, Tommy Bridges (who you will read more about when we rank the starting pitchers), and Dick McAuliffe.

There are those who advocate putting Freehan in the Hall of Fame. There are 14 catchers in the Hall of Fame who played in the majors since the start of the 20th century; how does Freehan compare to them? I looked at three of the statistics above: games played, runs created, and WAR. For most positions, I would not give much credence to the importance of games played, but behind the plate, with the difficulty of the job, I think it

is important. While WAR is important, it is limited when you are looking at players from the past, especially for a position without a lot of stats. For offense, I have used Runs Created for years and I think it gives a good measure of offensive ability.

Among all catchers since 1900, Freehan ranks 16th in runs created with 866, 15th in WAR with 44.8, and 23rd in games. Ten of the 14 Hall of Fame catchers have more runs created, from #1 Ivan Rodriguez with 1,398 to #13 Ernie Lombardi with 958. The four behind Freehan are Roy Campanella (who did not make his major league debut until he was 26 due to the color of his skin), and three players considered to be among the weakest Hall selections: Rick Ferrell, Ray Schalk and Roger Bresnahan. For WAR, those same 10 players are ahead of him (Bench #1 with 75.2, Lombardi at #13 the closest to Freehan with 45.9.) In games played, again 10 of the 14 Hall of Famers are ahead of Freehan. Bill James, in his 1999 Historical Baseball Abstract, had Freehan as the 12th best catcher of all time, with Rodriguez at 13th, certainly passing him since then.

Bill Freehan was a great player, and I would love to be able to advocate for his election to the Hall of Fame. However, it seems that his career is just a bit short compared to the generally accepted standard for catchers. There are those who disagree: Dan Holmes at the Detroit Athletic Company's website: <https://www.detroitathletic.com/blog/2013/09/20/freehan-was-best-catcher-of-his-era-and-deserves-hall-of-fame-consideration/> and Andy Patton of Motor City Bengals <https://motorcitybengals.com/2018/07/19/detroit-tigers-bill-freehan-hall-fame/>. But it is no disgrace to be a very good player but not be a Hall of Famer. Society founder and former Hall of Fame President Dale Petroskey noted that only about the top 1 percent of players make it to the Hall (it is about 1.5 percent at this time). Bill Freehan was a great player, the leader of the Tigers in an era we will never forget, and he need not be a Hall of Famer for us to appreciate what he meant to the Tigers. If there were a Tiger Hall of Fame -- what an idea! -- he'd be in on the first ballot.

Getting back to our Tigers list, Lance Parrish, like Freehan the star catcher on a Tiger World Series champion, is a solid #2. Parrish, sadly, left the Tigers as a free agent after the 1986 season when Tigers management denial over the shift in power from the owners to the players cost them Parrish, Kirk Gibson, and Jack Morris. Parrish caught two seasons in Philadelphia and three for the Angels before finishing his career with Seattle, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Toronto, and he actually had more runs created than Freehan in his career. Parrish is now the manager of the Tigers' low-A West Michigan Whitecaps. Another recent name on the list is Alex Avila, who was a polarizing player later in his Detroit career due to his struggles after his breakout 2011 season. I was always an Avila fan and was glad he re-signed with the Tigers in 2017 (which paid off when he and Justin Wilson yielded Jeimer Candelario and top prospect Isaac Paredes from the Cubs.) You might be surprised that Mickey Cochrane and Rodriguez did not rank higher on these lists; they had a huge impact on the team that is now shown here but both played for the Tigers for a relatively short time.

CELEBRATE! THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE '68 CHAMPIONS -- by Todd Miller

On an overcast late afternoon, 13 players and a coach from the 1968 World Series championship Tigers team received accolades from 30,268 fans. Although many in attendance remembered that unforgettable season as if it happened yesterday, a larger number of fans appeared as if they had experienced it only through stories told by older relatives and friends, or through books, documentaries and websites.

The festivities on Sept. 8 began with each honoree being driven in a Chevy Corvette from the right field gate around the outfield warning track to the Tigers' dugout while the Motown sound permeated the ballpark. The ex-players, who donned a replica of the road jerseys worn in St. Louis when their team won the Series, then went into the dugout before Tigers broadcaster Dan Dickerson, who served as master of ceremonies, introduced them to the adoring crowd. Honorees then made their way up the dugout steps onto a blue VIP carpet leading to their seats on a stage between the pitcher's mound and second base.

Participating alumni, in order of introduction, were coach Hal Naragon and players Jon Warden, Wayne Comer, Daryl Patterson, Tom Matchick, Jim Price, Dick Tracewski, John Hiller, Don Wert, Denny McLain, Mickey Stanley, Willie Horton, Mickey Lolich and Al Kaline.

Detroit News columnist Lynn Henning, a mid-Michigan native who has been covering sports throughout Michigan for more than 40 years, then addressed the crowd, calling the '68 Tigers "a God-graced gift from April through October" to a city in need of healing from the previous year's riots and the heartbreak of losing

the pennant on the last day of the season. He then recalled the joy of listening to Ernie Harwell and Ray Lane on a transistor radio, and of watching the rare televised game with George Kell (“our baseball version of Walter Cronkite”) and Larry Osterman providing the words that accompanied the images.

Henning referred to the team as “more than a winner; it was a blessing” amid national strife characterized by the assassinations of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy, and the ongoing conflict in Vietnam. He concluded his remarks by saying that “the Tigers gentlemen gathered here today, and their departed brothers, gave to this city, to this state and to this region the greatest sports gift of our lifetime.”

Former radio broadcaster Ray Lane followed Henning to the podium. He recalled highlights of the season and mentioned players’ off-field interests, including Denny McLain’s affinity for playing the organ and Mickey Lolich enjoying motorcycle riding, often to Tiger Stadium on game days. He ended his portion of the program by telling honorees, “Thank you for making an exciting, wonderful season for me and for the best fans in baseball, the Detroit fans.”

Kaline, the final speaker, represented his teammates by saying, “When I think back to our World Series run in ’68, it really began the year before, when we were one game shy of heading to the World Series. You can’t imagine how much motivation that gave us. We knew something special was coming in ’68, simply because we wouldn’t settle for anything less.

“Even when the ball club was down three games to one in the World Series, everyone in our clubhouse still believed we could come back against the Cardinals, and, boy, we sure did. ... On behalf of all of us, I’d like to emphasize how important the Tiger fans and the city of Detroit were to our success. The passion and energy in the stands at Tiger Stadium was incredible. It was an extremely rough time for the city, and we’re proud to have played a part in lifting the spirit of Detroit.”

Following Kaline’s heartfelt remarks, honorees left the stage and proceeded to chairs on the left side of the infield, next to framed road jerseys bearing their respective uniform numbers. The display also included an image of each player’s ’68 Topps baseball card and the 50th anniversary logo commemorating the ’68 World Series champions. Below each jersey is a plaque that reads “The legacy of your 1968 World Series championship, and its impact on the City of Detroit, will live on forever.”

Current players then presented their predecessors with scaled replicas of the ’68 World Series trophy. Among the presenters, Nick Castellanos gave a trophy to Kaline, Michael Fulmer did likewise to Lolich, Niko Goodrum honored Horton and James McCann gave a memento to Bill Freehan’s wife, Pat. It was a great way to show how deep the tradition of Tigers baseball runs, and how the players of today are indebted to those who preceded them. To a man, current players appreciated the opportunity to participate in the ceremony.

After honorees received replicas of the Series trophies, there was a moment of silence to remember the manager, coaches and players who have passed away: manager Mayo Smith, first-base coach Wally Moses, third-base coach Tony Cuccinello, pitching coach Johnny Sain, and players Ray Oyler, Norm Cash, Joe Sparma, Don McMahan, John Wyatt, Eddie Mathews, Earl Wilson, Pat Dobson, Bob Christian, Jim Northrup, Gates Brown and Dick McAuliffe.

To ensure that honorees have a tangible reminder of their departed teammates, Kaline arranged for the initials and uniform numbers of the deceased to be sewn onto the brims of the caps that honorees wore throughout the weekend.

Following the ceremony, recording artist Jose Feliciano (“Feliz Navidad,” “Light My Fire”) played the same soulful rendition of the national anthem which he gave before Game 5 of the ’68 Series at Tiger Stadium. The unconventional interpretation caused an uproar and almost resulted in the Tigers firing Ernie Harwell, who had arranged for Feliciano to perform.

Earlier in the day, Feliciano spoke at the Detroit Historical Museum, where he said, “If I hadn’t been born blind, I would have become a ballplayer.” He also characterized 1968 as both “Year of the Tiger and year of Feliciano,” given the trajectory of his career and the exposure he received from the anthem controversy. Pitcher Jon Warden was in attendance and said his teammates enjoyed Feliciano’s interpretation of “The Star-Spangled Banner” then and continue to appreciate it today.

Feliciano’s wife, the former Susan Omillan, is a native Detroiter who started a Jose Feliciano fan club while in high school in early 1968. After Susan’s attempts to contact Feliciano on her own went nowhere, she

turned to Harwell, knowing that he brought her idol to town during the World Series. Ernie arranged for the pair to meet, and the Felicianos have been married since 1982. They are the parents of three grown children.

Prior to the start of the game, Horton, Kaline, Lolich and Stanley threw out the first pitch in unison between the pitcher's mound and home plate. Matchick, Tracewski, Warden and Wert performed those honors the previous night.

Given our group's name, after the ceremony, in the press box (aka Ernie Harwell Media Center), I asked some of the honorees what came to mind immediately when they heard the name Mayo Smith. Their reactions were:

Wayne Comer – “He was great. He was always good to me. I got used as a pinch runner and pinch hitter more than I maybe should have, and it was because of him I got to play on a great team.”

John Hiller – “Very predictable. You always knew where you stood. Some guys may not have respected him, but I have no complaints about how he treated me.”

Mickey Lolich – “I didn't like him as a manager. He always was trying to tell me how to pitch, and I told him, ‘You never pitched, so don't tell me how to do it,’ but he never listened.”

Dick Tracewski – “Mayo was a good manager and a good guy.”

Don Wert – “Mayo was a great guy because he let us play and left us alone.”

Aided by shaky Cardinals relief pitching and a defensive miscue, the Tigers won 4-3, sending Detroit fans home happy with a walk-off win for the second consecutive night. Coincidentally, the score of Friday night's game was 5-3, courtesy of a Jeimer Candelario two-run homer, the same result as Game 5 of the '68 Series -- the game that kept the Tigers' hopes alive, thanks largely to Willie Horton's perfect throw to Bill Freehan in the top of the fifth inning, which nailed a standing Lou Brock at the plate.

That play, and the succeeding pair of games at Busch Stadium, made possible a weekend that Tigers fans should treasure almost as much as the accomplishment it celebrated.

TRAMMELL CEREMONY BRINGS BACK MEMORIES -- By Tom Plunkett

Although a work-related emergency prevented me from using the Society's field box seats to see Alan Trammell get his uniform number retired, thoughts of Tram the person and Tram the ballplayer flooded into my mind that Sunday in late August.

What I remember most about Alan as a player is that he embodied the spirit of Detroiters, including friends, family and neighbors I grew up with on the west side; dependable but not flashy, and someone that you could always count on. Tram was always there to make a critical play in the field or deliver a clutch hit. What an honor it was for us Tigers fans to have him play his entire 20-year career for our team -- the only player besides Al Kaline and Ty Cobb to wear the Old English “D” for that long.

Over the years, I've had the good fortune of being in Tram's company on several occasions. Each time, he was cordial and seemed to be genuinely interested in many topics of conversation.

He was always involved in charity work, and the first time that we met was at a Cystic Fibrosis fundraiser at the old Tiger Hall. Most notably, he, ex-Tigers third baseman Don Wert and a friend of mine played in a Caring Athletes for Children's and Henry Ford Hospitals (CATCH) charity golf tournament one year, although not as a foursome. We had a great time listening to old stories that “Wertie” told. Later, Mark “The Bird” Fidrych joined us. He was one of coolest guys I've ever met.

In 1984, having recently finished my college career in Tampa, I was working my first “real” job, which happened to be in central Florida near Lakeland. I attended a lot of spring training games and got an up-close look at the future World Series MVP and Hall of Famer because tickets were inexpensive and Grapefruit League teams' camps were located much closer together back then.

In 1987, the year Tram deserved to be the league MVP and got edged out by Toronto's George Bell for the honor, I was lucky enough to attend the last three games of the regular season, a weekend series against the Blue Jays in Tiger Stadium. The Tigers were a game behind Toronto, and swept to win the division. For the Saturday game, I had the great luck of walking up to the ticket window near game time and bought a single ticket -- front row behind home plate, surrounded by scouts with clipboards and radar guns. On Sunday, my friend and fellow Society member Kent Woodward and I witnessed the 1-0 Frank Tanana complete-game gem.

I remember the busloads of Jays fans who had parked on Michigan Avenue after the game, and I was so glad I wasn't in their shoes! Kent and I went down the street to Casey's, our traditional hangout before and after games. About an hour or so after the game ended, imagine our surprise when several Tigers players -- still in uniform pants, including Tram -- came in, got behind the bar and sprayed us all with champagne! I got some great pictures on my crummy disposable camera.

It's too bad the Tigers exhausted all of their mojo to become division champs. Nothing left in the tank for the Twins, who turned out to be Tram's final postseason opponent, as the Tigers were mediocre or worse during the final decade of his career. What a great privilege to have met Alan Trammell the man, and to have witnessed his accomplishments during his storied Tigers career.

TIGERS BOOKSHELF: "3" -- Reviewed by Todd Miller

Hall of Fame writer Tom Gage and the Tigers organization have outdone themselves with "3: A Salute to Alan Trammell." This companion piece to "6: A Salute to Al Kaline," initially published nearly a decade ago, includes many never-before-seen photos from Tram's youth, as well as scores of images that bring back pleasant memories of Number 3's exploits on the field and at the plate.

Complementing the stellar prose of the former Detroit News baseball scribe are reflections of teammates, managers and coaches, opponents, team executives and others. Those sentiments collectively explain why the third Tiger to wear the uniform for at least 20 seasons (Ty Cobb and Al Kaline are the others) is a Hall of Fame inductee who is more than worthy of the long overdue honor.

The most informative part of the nearly 200-page book focuses on Tram's early years growing up in San Diego, including the fact that he grew up with two older sisters and was a fine all-around athlete who excelled in baseball and basketball against kids who were several years older than he. Until now, that part of his life's story was not as well-known to us as the chronicles of his professional success. That long list of accomplishments goes back to his days in Double-A ball with the Montgomery Rebels, when he was named the Southern League's MVP in 1977, a year after the Tigers drafted him in second round.

Of special significance to Society members is a photo in the upper-right corner of page 127. It's of longtime members Mark and Carol Slater at the induction ceremonies this past summer in Cooperstown. The Slaters regularly attend our Annual Gatherings and have been longtime loyal supporters of our group.

"3: A Salute to Alan Trammell" is available through the Tigers and MLB websites. Autographed copies are \$100 and non-autographed volumes are \$40.

KING TIGER IS UP FOR GRABS – By Mark Pattison

Now starts the balloting for King Tiger, the Society's award to the Tigers player remarkable for both his on-the-field and off-the-field achievements. Take a look at the box scores, but then take a look at social media to see what this year's players were doing in the community. All votes must be received no later than Tuesday, Dec. 18, either by postal mail to Mark Pattison, 1221 Floral St. NW, Washington, DC 20012, or via email to pattison_mark@hotmail.com (put "King Tiger" in the subject line). Include the reasons for your choice; who knows, you just may appear in an issue of *Stripes*! We'll make the presentation to the winner before a home game on the Spring Training Trip.

DUES GOING UP IN JANUARY – By Mark Pattison

The Mayo Smith Society has been around since 1983. But this qualifies as news because this is the first time in 20 years that the Society has announced a dues increase. If you want to think back to 1998, the Tigers still played in Tiger Stadium, our top player was Damion Easley, our top pitcher was Brian Moehler, and Randy Smith was the general manager (which may explain Easley and Moehler).

Dues are going up to \$25 a year effective Jan. 1, 2019. But we're giving three months' notice so that you can add yourself and your family and friends at what's been a bargain for Tigers fans from sea to shining sea. (Non-U.S. dues will go up to \$28 USD.) Frankly, I'm surprised we've been able to avoid a hike for this long.

However, with \$25 annual dues, we'll be able to provide in the future everything we've provided in the past: (1) This newsletter, *Tigers Stripes*, for starters. We promise nine issues a year, but we've been delivering

at least 11 each year for the last 15 years, and have been monthly for the past decade, and we like it that way, (2) The *E-Mayo Flash* newsletter, available exclusively to members who get *Stripes* via email. We publish *E-Mayo Flash* when the Tigers are in the playoffs, or if there's news that just can't wait for the next issue, (3) Perhaps the biggest perk of all: the opportunity to buy seats for Tigers games at Comerica Park from our 81-game, four-seat box 16 rows behind the Detroit dugout AT COST (none of those pesky fees or charges that resellers soak you for), (4) The Annual Gathering at the Hockeytown Café with great speakers followed by a Tigers game at Comerica Park (see story below), (5) Our annual Spring Training trip to Lakeland (see story below), (6) Our annual King Tiger award (see story above), (7) Our annual "Mayo Day" to see the Tigers in Baltimore (see story below), (8) Trips to see Tigers farm clubs in action in the Mid-Atlantic, and (9) Our monthly "Tiger Talk" dinners on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Sign up now, get your buddies on board, and save some dough. Dues envelopes must be postmarked no later than Dec. 31 to qualify at the current rate. So what are you waiting for?

ANNUAL GATHERING DROPS PUCK AT HOCKEYTOWN CAFÉ JUNE 15 – By Mark Pattison

Since 2010, we've been at the Hockeytown Café for good eats and great speakers, among them Al Kaline, Alan Trammell, Al Avila, Mickey Lolich, Willie Horton, Dave Rozema, Tom Matchick, Craig Monroe, Tom Timmermann and others. Next year is no different. We've got a rain check on Jon Warden from when he had to bow out last year. We'll also get a second speaker. We tell you now so you can save this date: Saturday, June 15. We'll also have a 4 p.m. game between Detroit and AL Central Division champs Cleveland (you'll remember the Tigers beat the Indians 4-2 in 12 innings this year). More details to come.

"MAYO DAY" IS MEMORIAL DAY IN BALTIMORE – By Mark Pattison

If you live within hailing distance of the Society's birthplace in Washington, D.C., then you should make tracks to join your fellow Smithers in Baltimore on Memorial Day, Monday, May 27, for the tilt between the Tigers and the Orioles, a 1:05 p.m. start. We aim for seats in the 300 level as directly behind home plate as possible. FYI, the Tigers and O's play at 7:05 p.m. the following two days. If you want to be part of the Memorial Day bunch, get your name on the list now with David Raglin at darags@ymail.com.

SPRING TRAINING NEWS – By Mark Pattison

Fall has just begun, but spring has already sprung, as the Tigers issued their 2019 exhibition game schedule in August -- a record. The Society has chosen the dates Thurs. March 14-Wed. March 20 for our annual Spring Training Trip: seven games in seven days, including a cluster of four games in Lakeland in five days. Home games are against Boston, Atlanta, Pittsburgh and Baltimore; away games are on the west side of the state against Tampa Bay, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Our official hotel is the Ecco Suites in Lakeland. You're on your own to book the hotel and to travel to Florida (Tampa is slightly closer than Orlando, and Clearwater, the final game of the week, is way closer to Tampa). Book your flights now. The trip price -- games plus opening-night dinner at the minor-league complex, trip shirt and other goodies -- is TBD.

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For **Detroit Tigers 1984: What a Start! What a Finish!** (\$20) and

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authors David Raglin and Mark Pattison, send to:

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