

Tigers Stripes

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D
Mayo Smith Society

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Tigers Fans Who Always Care

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OBSERVATIONS ON THE PLAYOFFS – By David Raglin

On one hand, it was a disappointing season for the Tigers. The goal for 2013 was clear, World Series championship or bust. Unfortunately, it was the bust. By losing to the Red Sox in the American League Championship Series, they did not even get the chance to play in the World Series.

On the other hand, the Tigers did make baseball's Final Four for the third straight year. That is not easy to do, and certainly is an accomplishment worth celebrating. It was not that long ago that we suffering through 12 straight losing seasons, including summers with 109, 106, and (yikes) 119 losses.

What happened? I'm sure any reader of *Tigers Stripes* has a really good idea of the problems: the bullpen not able to hold off the opposition, the offense not hitting, baserunning flops, and sloppy defense. Society members who get their newsletter via e-mail got the bonus *E-Mayo Flash* reports after each game, and read all of the gory details. We assume you know about them and don't really want to be reminded. I certainly don't want to write about them again...)

Let's look at some stories that may not have gotten enough attention. Who were the MVPs for the Tigers in the postseason? That's about as easy a choice as there is. Justin Verlander made three starts in the postseason. In the first one in Game 2 of the AL Division Series, he and Oakland's Sonny Gray had an old-fashioned pitchers' duel. Verlander threw seven shutout innings, and Gray eight. Unfortunately, the combination of Drew Smyly, Al Albuquerque and Rick Porcello (in the pen for the playoffs) could not hold the Athletics back. Verlander's next start of the season was in the biggest game of the season so far, the rubber game of the five-game series. Verlander threw eight shutout innings this time to send the Tigers to the ALCS. Verlander made one start against the Red Sox in the ALCS, in Game 3, and he allowed his first postseason run of the year. Unfortunately, that was one more run that the Tigers got, and Verlander's eight shutout innings went for naught.

Verlander struggled during the 2013 season at times. During a nine-start stretch from May 11 to June 23, Verlander had a 6.04 ERA, allowing 61 hits in 50.2 innings (although he also struck out 60 batters). His velocity was down, and there were concerns that he had some sort of arm problems. Verlander maintained he was having trouble with his mechanics, and when he straightened them out, he'd be fine. He was right. Here are Verlander's last five starts of the season, two in the regular season and three in the playoffs:

Justin Verlander's Last Five Starts (Regular Season and Playoffs), 2013

Type	Date	Vs	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	ERA	Dec
Regular Season	September 23	@ Min	6.0	6	0	0	3	12	0.00	L
Regular Season	September 29	@ Mia	6.0	3	0	0	1	10	0.00	L
ALDS	October 5	@ Oak	7.0	4	0	0	1	11	0.00	ND(L)
ALDS	October 10	@ Oak	8.0	2	0	0	1	10	0.00	W
ALCS	October 15	vs Bos	8.0	4	1	1	1	10	1.13	L
Total			35.0	19	1	1	7	53	0.26	1-3

Wow! Those are like Little League numbers. It's not surprising that his velocity was back up, too. The only sad part is that he went 1-3 in the starts, and the Tigers only won one of the games, the decisive Game 5 of the ALDS.

The offensive MVP for the Tigers in the playoffs was another player who went through long stretches where he did not look good. Victor Martinez hit .232 with a .290 on-base percentage over the first three months of the 2013 season. There were whispers that his bat was slow and that missing an entire season and trying to

come back at age 34 was too much for him. In the last three months of the season, we saw another Victor Martinez. We saw that same Victor Martinez in the playoffs, as his stats basically mirrored his second half numbers:

Victor Martinez, 2013 Season by Period

Date	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	RC	RC/G
April, May, June 2013	297	29	69	13	0	6	40	27	36	.232	.290	.337	30	3.3
July August, September 2013	308	39	113	23	0	8	43	27	26	.367	.418	.519	67	8.7
October 2013 (Postseason)	42	9	17	4	0	1	5	1	3	.386	.432	.571	10	10.2

(This might be a lesson for those of us who are ready to give up on Prince Fielder after a so-so regular season and a dreadful playoffs. Admit it: Some of you gave up on Verlander (at least as a star) and V-Mart.)

JIM LEYLAND – AN APPRECIATION – By David Raglin

While we were in the ALCS against the Red Sox, we would have seen a press conference on Oct. 21 as a good omen, to discuss the upcoming World Series. Instead, the Tigers lost the ALCS and we got an ominous email announcing a press conference, with no reason. It turned out to be very surprising news, as Jim Leyland announced his retirement as the manager of the Detroit Tigers after eight seasons.

It was a very good eight-year run for the Tigers. The Tigers went 700-597 in the regular season, an average of 87.5 wins a year. They made the playoffs four times, including the last three seasons. They won all four Division Series (the only team to be 4-0 or better since the Division Series format began) and two American League pennants. They beat the Yankees in three series without losing a series to the Bronx Bombers, the only team in baseball history to be able to do that. Yes, they lost both World Series they were in, but to lose a World Series, you have to make it there in the first place. It's been a great time to be a Tigers fan.

We need to remember how bad it had been before Jim Leyland came to Detroit. The Tigers had suffered losing seasons for 12 years in a row. They were better in 2004 and 2005 than in the infamous 2003 season, mostly due to an influx of free agents, but they still only won 72 and 71 games those years. The only additions were veteran free agent Kenny Rogers and a rookie promoted from high A-Lakeland, Justin Verlander. I remember thinking that it would be a great accomplishment to have a record over .500.

Even though Jim Leyland managed more than 1,300 games for the Tigers, including playoffs, his defining moment may have come only 13 games into his managerial career in Detroit. The 2006 team started 5-0 (I remember being so giddy over that!), but they lost six of the next eight to drop to 7-6. The last of those games was a getaway-day 10-2 loss to Cleveland. The resulting tirade from Leyland was heard outside the clubhouse. Justin Verlander, reflecting on it later, said "Right there, we knew what people meant when they said he had a lot of fire." Leyland said, "It was just an overall atmosphere that you smell every once in a while that it just wasn't that important that we win that game, and it's got to be if we're going to be good." The Tigers went out the West Coast and after losing a close game, won the next five on the way to a 28-8 streak that also features six, seven, and eight game winning streaks that put them into first place until the last day of the season.

Beyond the baseball, one of Leyland's most endearing features was the responsibility he felt to Tigers fans. He recognized that the area was going through an economic crisis, and he appreciated the fact that they still filled the ballpark every night. He knew that the three hours at the ball park and in front of the TV was a respite from their troubles, and he felt that he and his players owed their maximum effort to their fans. He would get choked up talking about it. I know I loved that he cared and would show it. Fans love to pick on the local manager and say how they would have done things differently. That's part of the game. But we should recognize how lucky we have been over the past eight years. Thanks, Jim, for eight exciting seasons.

IS JIM LEYLAND A HALL OF FAMER? – By Todd Miller

A couple of days after the Red Sox bested our favorites in the ALCS, Jim Leyland resigned as the Tigers' 36th manager to accept a yet-to-be-determined position within the Detroit organization. Jim's decision

ends a 22-year career in the dugout and begs the question, “Is Jim Leyland worthy of induction to the Hall of Fame?” Based on the numbers, the answer is a resounding yes.

Among Jim’s contemporaries who have achieved (or will doubtless gain) baseball’s highest honor, Jim’s time in the dugout is near the bottom of the range compared to his good friend, Tony LaRussa (33 seasons), Bobby Cox (29), Joe Torre (29), Sparky Anderson (26), Lou Piniella (23), Dick Williams (22), Tommy Lasorda (21), Whitey Herzog (19) and Earl Weaver (17), whose final year of managing the Orioles (1986) was Jim’s first campaign running a big-league team. Among these eight managers, LaRussa, Cox and Torre are first-ballot shoo-ins when they become eligible for Hall of Fame induction over the next five years, Piniella is also a likely inductee within the next decade, and Anderson, Lasorda, Herzog and Weaver are already enshrined..

LaRussa’s 33 years at the helm of three teams (White Sox, A’s and Cardinals) tie John McGraw for the second-longest managerial career in major league history, topped only by Connie Mack’s 53 years piloting the Philadelphia Athletics (1901-50) and Pittsburgh Pirates (1894-96) – a tenure doubtless enhanced by the fact that he was at least a part-owner of the Philadelphia team for much of the time he served as manager.

When it comes to games managed, Jim in the top 13 among current and prospective Hall of Famers, having filled out a lineup card 3,497 times in Pittsburgh, Florida, Colorado and Detroit. Among contemporaries, LaRussa, Cox, Torre and Piniella have Jim beat, but he managed more games than Lasorda, Herzog and Weaver. In the wins department, Jim’s 1,769 victories are 15th on the all-time list among the nearly 700 men who have managed big-league teams, putting Jim in the top 2 percent.

Contemporaries who amassed more wins than Jim are LaRussa, Cox, Torre, Anderson and Piniella. A significant reason why his victory total is lower than the others is that he had the misfortune of spending four years (1993-96) managing a Pirates team gutted by two ownership groups unwilling or unable to sign quality free agents while the organization’s player development operations failed to produce talented players. He also presided over a 1998 Marlins team that finished 54-108 a year after winning the World Series because owner Wayne Huizenga conducted a fire sale during the offseason and throughout the year to shed payroll.

When it comes to winning percentage, Jim is at the bottom of the list among his contemporaries, having won at a .506 clip (1,769-1,728), just below Casey Stengel (.508) -- who piloted some awful Boston Braves, Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Mets teams before and after reaching the heights with the Yankees. Among Hall of Famers, Jim’s career winning percentage beats those of Wilbert Robinson (.500), Bucky Harris (.493 – he managed the Tigers 1929-33 and 1954-56) and Mack (.486).

As for World Series championships, Jim’s single title with the Marlins and two American League pennants with the Tigers enable him to hold his own. LaRussa has three World Series wins with the Cardinals (2) and A’s (1), in addition to three league pennants while guiding those teams. Cox won a single World Series while skippering the Braves (1995) and Blue Jays, and lost four World Series with the Braves.

Torre, who struggled in the National League as manager of the Mets (player-manager in 1977), Braves and Cardinals, won four rings with the Yankees and was on the losing end of two World Series in The Bronx. He also guided the Braves and Dodgers to three National League Championship Series.

Anderson won three World Series in Cincinnati (2) and Detroit (1). Additionally, he guided his Reds teams to a pair of National League pennants and led the Tigers to a division title in 1987.

Piniella led the Reds to the 1990 World Series title, going wire-to-wire just as the ’84 Tigers had done. He also played a significant role in making the Seattle Mariners competitive in the mid-’90s and early 2000s, arguably saving baseball in the Pacific Northwest, before moving on to his hometown Devil Rays, and finally to the Cubs, guiding the North Siders to playoff berths in 2007-08.

Williams led the A’s to a pair of World Series championships, and the Red Sox and Padres to pennants, while Lasorda guided the Dodgers to four World Series appearances and two championships.

Herzog piloted the Cardinals to a pair of World Series championships in the ’80s and would have had a third if umpire Don Denkinger hadn’t blown a call at first base in Game 6 of the ’85 Series, giving new life to the Royals. Weaver guided the Orioles to a World Series title against Anderson’s Big Red Machine in 1970 lost and three Fall Classics to the Miracle Mets (1969) and the underdog Pirates (1971 and 1979). With a 1-3 record in World Series competition, Weaver’s record most closely resembles Jim’s. Furthermore, Jim’s teams in Pittsburgh and Detroit lost a total of five league championship series (LCS – 1990-92 and 2011, ’13,

respectively), and Weaver's Orioles teams were bounced twice from the LCS at the hands of A's teams managed by Williams and Alvin Dark in 1973-74). If the Hall of Fame welcomed The Earl of Baltimore with open arms, it should do the same for Jim Leyland.

On the intangible side of the ledger, Jim revived interest in baseball in a pair of cities dripping with tradition, and whose teams had fallen on hard times. In an era of parity, the Pirates were one of two NL teams that didn't make the playoffs during the decade of the 1980s. (The Reds, their nemesis in four LCS during the previous decade, were the other.) Against all odds, Jim guided the Pirates to three consecutive division titles and almost won the NL pennant in 1992. Those teams set franchise records for attendance that were shattered only when the Bucs moved from drab Three Rivers Stadium to breathtaking PNC Park.

When Jim took over the Tigers in 2006, the team had experienced 12 consecutive losing seasons and were three years removed from losing 119 games – one short of the major league record set by the '62 Mets.

During Jim's eight years in Detroit, he became the third-winningest manager in a Tigers uniform, accumulating 700 wins, trailing only Anderson (1,331) and Hughie Jennings (1,131), the only Tigers manager to lead a Detroit team to three consecutive postseason appearances (1907-09) until Jim accomplished the feat over the past trio of seasons. Anderson spent parts of 17 seasons in a Tigers uniform (1979-95) and Jennings, a 1945 Hall of Fame inductee as a player, managed the Tigers for 14 seasons (1907-20).

Jim's 11 seasons at the helm in Pittsburgh enabled him to become the third-winningest manager in Pirates history, behind Hall of Famer Fred Clarke and Danny Murtaugh, who guided the Bucs to World Series championships in 1960 and 1971. If the Baseball Writers Association of America voters do their homework, Jim Leyland should be inducted to the Hall of Fame within the next decade, sooner rather than later.

As the Tigers' most loyal fans, we appreciate the contributions that Jim has made to Tigers baseball over the past eight seasons and look forward to him continuing to help the organization try to end its World Series championship drought.

SHORT STRIPES

Congratulations to Miguel Cabrera on winning the Hank Aaron Award as the outstanding offensive player in the American League in 2013. (Paul Goldschmidt of Arizona was the National League winner.) We would think, though, that accepting the award was bittersweet as it was in a ceremony before Game 4 of the World Series in St. Louis. He'd much rather been wearing his road Detroit uniform and not a suit.

A postseason note you might have missed. When David Ortiz hit his grand slam in Game 2 of the ALCS, each run was charged to a different pitcher—Joaquin Benoit (batter), Al Alburquerque (1st), Drew Smyly (2nd), and Jose Veras (3rd). It was the eighth time that had happened, the first in the postseason. Twice, the Tigers were on the good side. On July 10, 1983 against Seattle, Lance Parrish hit the grand slam, and on July 10, 1988, Pat Sheridan was the slammer. Joe Posnanski wrote a nice piece on this: Check out <http://joeposnanski.com/joeblogs/four-pitcher-grand-slams-results/>. By the way, the grand slam in Game 6 caused three pitchers to be charged with runs.

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