

Tigers Stripes

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WINS, RUN SUPPORT, AND A PHOTOFINISH CY YOUNG RACE – By David Raglin

It's easy to forget now how Justin Verlander's season started. After six starts, he had allowed seven runs once, eight runs once, and sported a 6.49 ERA. Verlander insisted he was this close to "it," and he certainly was right. Verlander is one of the leading candidates for the American League Cy Young Award. Let's take a look at the contenders.

We have picked eight starters to show in the charts below. Notice we have not included Zack Britton or any other relievers. Britton had a great year, but a closer, throwing 60-80 innings a year, does not have the value of a starter. Look at it this way: would you trade Verlander for Britton? Of course not, nor would we make the trade for the other top starters. That being said, here are our finalists:

Our American League Cy Young Finalists, 2016

Pitcher	Tm	G	IP	H	HR	BB	SO	W	L	ERA	WHIP	QS%	FIP	BA	OBP	SLG	bWAR	fWAR
Kluber	CLE	32	215.0	170	22	57	227	18	9	3.14	1.06	69%	3.26	.216	.274	.357	6.4	5.1
Verlander	DET	34	227.7	171	30	57	254	16	9	3.04	1.00	79%	3.49	.207	.263	.368	6.2	5.2
Porcello	BOS	33	223.0	193	23	32	189	22	4	3.15	1.01	79%	3.40	.230	.268	.367	5.0	5.2
Sale	CHW	32	226.7	190	27	45	233	17	10	3.34	1.04	72%	3.46	.227	.279	.372	4.9	5.2
Quintana	CHW	32	208.0	192	22	50	181	13	12	3.20	1.16	72%	3.56	.246	.295	.393	5.2	4.8
Tanaka	NYY	31	199.7	179	22	36	165	14	4	3.07	1.08	61%	3.51	.236	.272	.373	5.4	4.6
Hamels	TEX	32	200.7	185	24	77	200	15	5	3.32	1.31	69%	3.98	.243	.319	.380	5.0	3.0
Happ	TOR	32	195.0	168	22	60	163	20	4	3.18	1.17	66%	3.96	.231	.295	.371	4.4	3.2

WHIP: (W + H)/ IP (basically men on base per inning)

QS: % of starts that were quality starts—at least six innings and three or less earned runs allowed

FIP: Fielding Independent Pitching, an ERA-like stat taking into account only home runs, walks, and strikeouts (the things not influenced by fielding)

bWAR: Wins Above Replacement as measured by Baseball Reference

fWAR: Wins Above Replacement, as measured by Fangraphs

The players are sorted by the average of the bWAR and fWAR. As you can see, the WAR estimates vary greatly. Baseball Reference's WARs are generally higher and rate Verlander and Cleveland's Corey Kluber higher than the other candidates. So, we will not be relying on WAR very much here.

The two starters at the bottom of the list, Cole Hamels of Texas and J.A. Happ of Toronto, are notably lower in several categories. Their on-base percentage and slugging percentage allowed are higher, they are at the low end of innings pitched, and their FIP is higher. (I am not a big fan of FIP, because it assumes that the chances of a ball in play being turned into an out are random, which I think is not at all true. However, it is a good measure of key variables of a pitcher's line, so it has some value.) In fact, the only reason I included Happ was his 20 wins.

Looking at the other six starters, their stats are very similar. Verlander (along with Kluber) is on the top end in WAR, percentage of quality starts, WHIP, on-base percentage, innings pitched, and way ahead on strikeouts. Based on those stats, I'd cut the race to four names: Verlander Kluber, Porcello and Sale.

There isn't much to distinguish between those four. All of them would be worthy candidates. I would pick Verlander for a few reasons: (1) OK, I'm a bit biased, (2) the combination of the stats above, (3) his strong end of the season (ERA from August on: 2.13; from September on: 1.82) during the Tigers' late-season push to the playoffs, and (4) he played behind a much worse defense.

The Tigers had -50 Defensive Runs Saved, meaning the Baseball Info Systems estimated the Tigers fielding cost them 50 runs compared to an average team, while the Red Sox were +53, Cleveland +36, and Chicago -3. We don't know how much it affected Verlander (probably less than average because he strikes out so many guys), but it certainly hurt him, while Porcello and Kluber were benefiting from good fielding support.

I think most people expect Porcello to win based on his 22 wins. Porcello would not be a bad choice, but the 22 wins is not the reason to pick him. This is not meant to be a rant on the wins statistic. Wins are the most important thing a player can contribute to his team, but Porcello's 22 wins does not mean that he did more to help his team to win than Verlander's 16 wins did. Porcello was blessed with an incredible amount of run support while Verlander got below-average run support. Let's look at the number of runs scored in their starts:

Run Support for Justin Verlander and Rick Porcello, 2016

Starter	0 Runs	1 Run	2 Runs	3 Runs	4 Runs	5 Runs	6 Runs	7 Runs	8 Runs	9 Runs	10+ Runs	Average
Verlander	3	6	0	7	8	3	2	0	1	1	3	4.05
Porcello	1	2	1	1	4	6	3	2	5	2	6	6.83

The differences are stark. American League clubs averaged 4.52 runs per game, so the Tigers, who scored 4.66 runs per game themselves, were a below-average club at the plate when Verlander started. The Red Sox scored a league-leading 5.42 runs per game but went crazy when Porcello was on the mound, getting 6.83 runs per start. That is not something the pitcher can control and varies greatly from year to year; for example, Boston got only 3.82 runs per start for Porcello last year.

Verlander received three or fewer runs of support in his starts 16 times; Porcello, only five times. On the other side, Porcello received eight or more runs of support 13 times, compared to Verlander with five. The last game of the season was a perfect example; Verlander allowed one run in seven innings but lost 1-0. It was the second Verlander start of September the Tigers lost 1-0; (Sept. 17, when Verlander allowed one run in seven innings. Verlander allowed two or fewer runs in 23 starts; he went 12-3 with eight no-decisions in those games. Porcello allowed two or fewer runs only 16 times and went 14-1 with one no-decision. Porcello deserves credit for pitching so well, but his 22-4 record, as opposed to Verlander's 16-9 record, was based on run support.

CHANGES IN 2017? – By David Raglin

Sometimes the best-laid plans go awry. The last decade, the Tigers' offseason has been generally a look for free agents to fill the team's holes to help continue the quest for a World Series championship. I had planned this detailed article looking at who was available and whom the Tigers might sign. Then, came Al Avila's postseason meeting with the media where he said things such as, "Changes are coming. ... I can't call it a rebuild because we haven't really broken anything down. I'm not comfortable with the word 'rebuild.' I don't think that's the right term. I've read 'retool,' but I don't know if that's the right term. I don't know if there's a term for what I want to do here. I really don't. If you guys can come up with a slogan, let me know, and we'll go with it. In describing the process, you can probably name it however you want to name it. It's, 'Hey, we want to get younger, we want to get leaner, we want to run the organization without having to go over the means of the organization.' It's not going to be easy, but it has to be done."

What does what Avila said mean for this offseason? First of all, no players like Matt Wieters, the Orioles' switch-hitting catcher and Scott Boras client who could have allowed James McCann to be a platoon player. Instead, recall the Curtis Granderson deal. Grandy was a Tiger legend at that point but his contract was not cheap. The Tigers traded Granderson and a bottom-of-the-rotation starter, Edwin Jackson, for a younger, cheaper replacement center fielder, Austin Jackson, a young controllable starter, Max Scherzer, and two relievers, Phil Coke and Daniel Schlereth. That trade helped make the Tigers' playoff teams this decade possible.

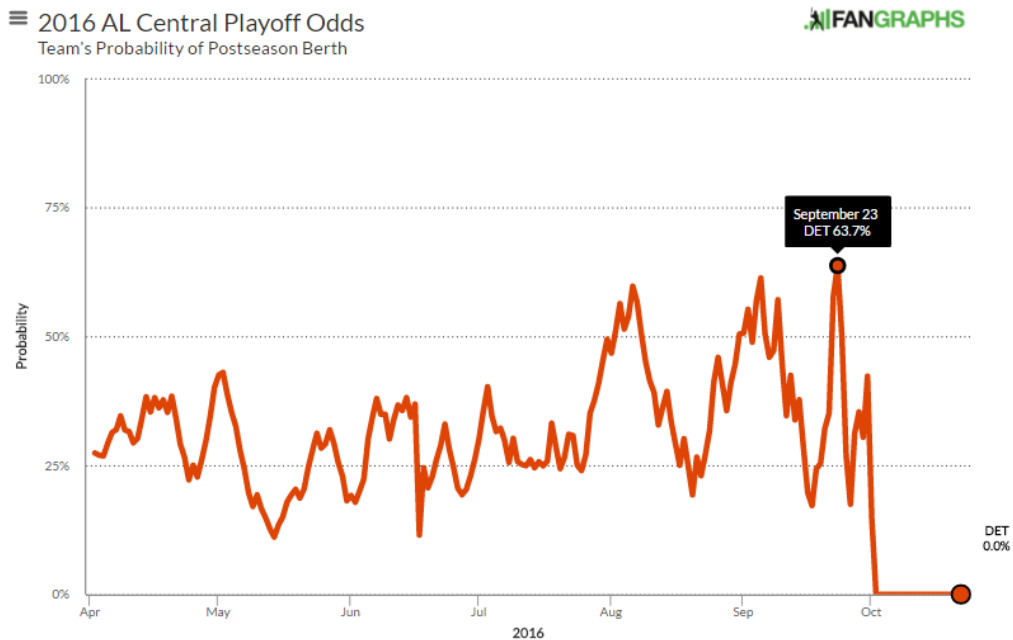
What would that mean for the current Tigers team? There are not a lot or marketable players who they would be able to trade to get younger. We love Miggy, but his contract is a show-stopper. Nick Castellanos, Michael Fulmer, Daniel Norris, and Matt Boyd are the kind of players they are trying to get, not trade. Really,

the best options are (gulp) Justin Verlander and Ian Kinsler. Both are expensive, so the Tigers would have to include some money, but both are great players that could help a team win in 2017. It would be sad to trade Verlander, who has been a Tiger his whole career and is synonymous with the franchise, to make up for past failings. Kinsler possesses skills that are very different than his teammates. The Tigers are a power-based team that does not get on base enough, is slow, and plays bad defense. Kinsler is an on-base guy who runs the bases well and plays great defense.

TOPSY-TURVY TIGERS – By David Raglin

We’ve talked several times this season about how the Tigers have been inconsistent, so I was not planning on doing that again. However, I found another way to look at it, so indulge me as we look at it again.

Various statistical web sites show in their daily standings what they consider the “playoff probability” for each team each day during the season. They simulate the games in the rest of the season a bunch of times (for example, Fangraphs does it 10,000 times) and count the number of times each team makes the playoffs. Here is their graph for the Tigers this season:



Detroit Tigers Streaks, Including Playoff Probabilities, Late 2016 Season

Date	Cumulative		In Period		Div GB	WC GB	Play Prob	Summary
	W	L	W	L				
Thru Mon, Jul 25	52	48	----	----	-5.5	-4.0	24%	-----
Thru Sat, Aug 6	61	49	9	1	-2.0	+0.5	60%	Beat 3 contenders: BOS, HOU, and NYM; scored 10+ runs 3 times
Thru Sat, Aug 20	64	59	3	10	-7.0	-3.5	19%	Scored 2 or less runs 9 times
Thru Mon, Sep 5	75	62	11	3	-4.5	0.0	61%	Swept MIN and CHW; only 5 games against .500+ teams
Thru Sat, Sep 17	78	70	3	8	-8.0	-3.0	17%	Split with MIN, lost first 2 in CLE series
Thru Fri, Sep 23	83	70	5	0	-7.0	+0.5	64%	Beat CLE, swept MIN, beat KCR
Thru Mon, Sep 26	83	73	0	3	-8.0	-2.0	17%	Scored 17 runs but allowed 26, including a 12-9 loss.
Thru Fri, Sep 30	86	73	3	0	-6.0	-0.5	42%	Beat CLE twice and won first against ATL
Thru Sun, Oct 2	86	75	0	2	-8.0	-2.5	0%	Lost last two games of the season vs ATL, the last 1-0

Things were not looking good in late July but then the Tigers went on their best stretch of the season, winning nine of ten mostly against top competition, moving into wild-card position. That made the next stretch even more frustrating, going 3-10 and scoring two runs or less nine times (going 1-8 in those games). The rest

of the table is self-explanatory. Their playoff probability height came Friday, Sept., 23, after their fifth win a row, a strong Michael Fulmer performance against Kansas City. Unfortunately, things did not work out and they did not make the playoffs.

All of the results went wrong the last day of the season, but it would have been so cool if they had not. Not just as a Tigers fan; it could have been the most amazing story of the year. If they had won and Baltimore and Toronto had lost, they would have gone home on Monday to play Cleveland. If they had won, they would go to Baltimore or Toronto for the playoff for the second wild card slot on Tuesday. If they had won again, they would go to the other one of those two teams on Wednesday for the wild-card game. If they had continued to win, they would have gone to Texas for the first game of the Division Series on Thursday. Five games in five days against five teams, four of them win-or-go-home. What a story that could have been!

WHO WILL BE CROWNED KING TIGER? – By Mark Pattison

While there is disappointment at not making the playoffs, the 2016 Tigers were more of a return to the form of earlier this decade, when the team reeled off four straight AL Central pennants. And, due to a season like this one, there are players who assert their dominance on the field, as well as players who come seemingly out of the woodwork to make significant contributions. Through all of the six-month season, they still find time to be exemplars in the community. And that's how we -- how you -- judge King Tiger. It's easy to look up stats, but we also look for the things that don't show up in the box score, both on and off the field. Consider each of the names below to see who merits your vote.

Here are the rules. You have one vote and one vote only. Multiple votes will result in both not being counted. If you and your spouse, for instance are joint members, you get one vote. But no split votes between two players! If you'd like to offer the reasoning behind your vote, go right ahead; we regularly feature a sampling of comments from Smithers on their choices, even if their nominee isn't the eventual winner. There are two ways to vote: Via email at pattison_mark@hotmail.com -- put "King Tiger" in the subject field -- and via postal mail to Mark Pattison, 1221 Floral St. NW, Washington, DC 20012. All entries must be received by 11:59 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 4. This means we'll send another reminder in the next issue of Stripes if you haven't already cast your ballot.

So as to appear as non-prejudicial as possible, we are listing each player from the 2016 Tigers in alphabetical order. Choose your favorite and vote!

Mike Aviles, Erick Aybar, Matt Boyd, Miguel Cabrera, Nick Casetellanos, Tyler Collins, Buck Farmer, Michael Fulmer, Anthony Gose, Shane Greene, Blaine Hardy, John Hicks, Jose Iglesias, JaCoby Jones, Logan Kensing, Ian Kinsler, Mark Lowe, Dixon Machado, Joe Mantiplay, Cameron Maybin, J.D. Martinez, Victor Martinez, James McCann, Casey McGehee, Dustin Molleken, Steven Moya, Daniel Norris, Bobby Parnell, Mike Pelfrey, Alex Presley, Francisco Rodriguez, Andrew Romine, Bruce Rondon, Kyle Ryan, Jarrod Saltalamacchia, Aníbal Sanchez, Warwick Saupold, Justin Upton, Drew VerHagen, Justin Verlander, Alex Wilson, Bobby Wilson, Justin Wilson, Jordan Zimmermann.

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