

Tigers Stripes

The Newsletter of the



Mayo Smith Society

Vol. 30, No. 10

Tigers Fans Who Always Care

December 2014

WELCOME BACK – By David Raglin

To nobody's surprise, Victor Martinez' time away from the Tigers was more of a short vacation. After checking out other opportunities, Martinez re-signed with Detroit, getting a four-year, \$68 million deal.

Will he be worth it? He will be in 2015 unless something strange happens. The question is the later years. The one good sign is that he has been at his best the last year and a half, which is something to say for a player who has more than six runs created per game in 11 of his 13 seasons in the majors. The two off-years were 2009 and 2013, but 2013 comes with a big asterisk, as you can see below.

Victor Martinez, 2011 to 2014

Year	G	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	BA	OBP	SLG	RC	RC/G
2011	145	540	76	178	40	0	12	103	46	51	.330	.380	.470	93	6.4
2013, Thru June 21	71	265	24	60	11	0	5	33	23	33	.226	.281	.325	23	2.8
2013, June 22 On	88	340	44	122	25	0	9	50	31	29	.359	.413	.512	65	7.7
2014	151	561	87	188	33	0	32	103	70	42	.335	.409	.565	126	8.5

As we all know, Martinez missed the whole 2012 season with a knee injury that changed Tigers history (since it caused them to sign Prince Fielder.) When he came back in 2013, he looked dreadful, until the Mayo Smith Society came to town. (Later analysis by Mark Simon of ESPN indicated, though, that some of that was bad luck; Martinez had one of the best hard-hit balls rates in the league, but they were just not falling in.)

We can't really take credit for it, but at our Annual Gathering game in 2013 on June 22, Martinez got on base all five times up at the plate, including three hits, five RBIs, and a grand slam home run as the Tigers beat Martinez' former Red Sox teammates 10-3 in front of a sellout crowd which included almost 100 Society members. From then on, it was like everything changed, as you can see in the stats above.

He did even better in 2014, as his 8.5 runs created per game led the American League, as did his .409 on-base percentage (which showed he had the formula for a great season...) His .565 slugging percentage was second in the league. He had the sixth-highest hard-hit ball percentage in the majors, after Troy Tulowitzki of Colorado, Paul Goldschmidt of Arizona, David Ortiz of Boston, teammate Miguel Cabrera, and Daren Mesoraco of Cincinnati; 23.3 percent of Martinez' at-bats ended with a hard-hit ball. The hard-hit ball percentage especially makes me bullish on V-Mart's future. Pitchers are certainly not sneaking things by the Tigers cleanup hitter.

Another reason we're happy about this signing is that Victor Martinez really wanted to stay a Tiger. At the press conference announcing the re-signing, Tigers president-general manager-CEO Dave Dombrowski relayed the story that late in the summer, Martinez pulled Dombrowski aside in the clubhouse and said, "Maybe I'm not supposed to do this because my agents may not like this, but I want you to know how much I want to be a Detroit Tiger. I don't want to go anywhere after this contract. This is like my home. It's like my family and my family feels the same way and I want to be a Detroit Tiger." I don't know about anybody else, but that means something to me. Yes, he did test the market and did not take a hometown discount, but he really did want to stay a Tiger. We're happy to have him end his career wearing the Old English D.

One bit of trivia here: Martinez finished second in the American League MVP voting to Mike Trout of the Angels. Trout won the award unanimously, capturing all of the first-place votes, but Martinez took a majority of the second-place votes (16 of 30) and was in the top seven slots of all but one voter (who left him off the ballot; should that guy be a voter?). This is the fifth year in a row the Tigers have had one of the two

most valuable players in the AL as judged by the writers. Of course, Miggy won it in 2013 and 2012 and Justin Verlander in 2011. In 2010, Miggy was second to Josh Hamilton of the Texas Rangers.

AUSMUS AS MANAGER – By David Raglin

He's been the manager for a year now, and Brad Ausmus certainly had Tigers fans talking. Some people liked him, but more (at least among the vocal part of the population) seemed to be quite unhappy with his performance. Here is my unvarnished, hard-hitting, take-no-prisoners opinion on whether or not Brad Ausmus is a good manager: I don't know.

That probably sounds like I'm wimping out, but hear me out. First of all, much of the discussion of a manager, both good and bad, among fans is regarding the lineup and the in-game moves. Those are an important part of the job, but not the major part of the job as I see it. After all, the Tigers did not improve in 2006 under Jim Leyland because he was the master strategist. They won because he changed things in the clubhouse. Leyland was known for walking through the clubhouse to take the pulse of his team, and he was a master manager of people.

We can relate that to our lives. We've all had good managers and bad managers at work. Don't you recall the work going so much better and the organization succeeding when we had good leadership? Now, imagine your job put you in the public spotlight every day, and you pretty much living with your co-workers for seven to eight months at a time. Wouldn't a good manager of people be essential?

Was Brad Ausmus a good manager of people in 2014? I really don't know. If there was a lot written about Ausmus' leadership by the people around the team every day, I missed it. On one hand, Victor Martinez, unprompted, in an interview right after the season ended, said that Ausmus had done a good job. From V-Mart, that means something. On the other hand, from several press reports, Miguel Cabrera was much more surly this year than in past year. His injuries are blamed for that surliness, but maybe the manager could have helped with that. Also, the team was highly inconsistent in 2014, and part of a manager's job is to nip those losing stretches in the bud.

Now let's get to the in-game strategy part of the job. There were times that his strategy drove me crazy, just as Jim Leyland's did at times. Probably the thing I was most disappointed about was the rigid use of relievers in certain innings or situations only. Joe Nathan was the closer, and so even when he was terrible, he was the closer. Other guys were the sixth- and seventh-inning guys or the eighth-inning guys. Even in the playoffs, when the games meant so much, it did not change.

Matt Williams, another rookie manager who had never managed in the minors, came under the same criticism, leaving rookie Aaron Barrett on the mound as their final game in the NLCS got away from the Nationals and their three best relievers sat in the bullpen. This may be a stretch, but it's like me cooking. I rarely cooked when I was a bachelor, and almost never since (a good idea), so on the rare occasions when I do cook, I follow the recipe to the letter, because I don't have the experience to experiment. My wife Barb, on the other hand, is a great cook, and she sees the recipe as more of a guide that she is able to deviate from if she has a better idea.

Ausmus and Williams, lacking experience, were very much by-the-book managers, while, to give an example, Buck Showalter of Baltimore, a veteran manager was willing to manage differently in the playoffs. In Game 1, I was glad when they took out Chris Tillman after five innings. The O's had Andrew Miller, Darren O'Day, and Zach Britton for innings 7-8-9, but I thought we could get them in the sixth. Unfortunately for us, the sixth is when Showalter brought out Miller.

However, I have two defenses for Ausmus' in-game moves. First, he had no good options in his bullpen and on his bench. Going back to Game 1, when he brought in Joba Chamberlain in the eighth, I was screaming for Joakim Soria. After Chamberlain failed, Ausmus brought in Soria, who failed even worse. When he needed good pinch hitters in Games 2 and 3, the best option was Hernan Perez. It was easy for Buck Showalter to look good when he did have those three strong relievers to bring. Not that I agreed with every one of his moves, but that is true of every manager. I think Ausmus was smart to DH Miggy to relieve some of the stress on his heel; Cabrera responded with a Player-of-the-Month performance in September.

Next season will be a good test of Ausmus’ managerial skills, both in the clubhouse and on the field. For the first time in years, the Tigers will not be overwhelming favorites in the Central Division, what with the Royals’ strong postseason and the talented Indians.

THE TIGERS ARE ALL RIGHT – By David Raglin

Well, not all right-handed, but more than any other team in the league in 2014. You probably heard Dave Dombrowski’s goal to get some more left-handed hitters, preferably in the outfield. Anthony Gose was the first (although he is not a good hitter, he does hit right-handers much better than lefties). Why this emphasis? Look at the chart below:

American League Plate Appearances: Batter Hand, Platoon Advantage, and Opposing Pitcher Hand

Team	Plate Appearances	Batters			Platoon Advantage			Opposing Pitchers		
		RHB	LHB	%RHB	Yes	No	%Yes	RHP	LHP	%RHP
DETROIT	6,202	4,750	1,452	76.6	2,788	3,414	45.0	4,522	1,680	72.9
Baltimore	6,130	3,938	2,192	64.2	2,832	3,298	46.2	4,572	1,558	74.6
Los Angeles	6,285	4,025	2,260	64.0	3,283	3,002	52.2	4,632	1,653	73.7
Tampa Bay	6,205	3,851	2,354	62.1	3,357	2,848	54.1	4,592	1,613	74.0
Texas	6,026	3,706	2,320	61.5	2,924	3,102	48.5	4,330	1,696	71.9
Chicago	6,077	3,724	2,353	61.3	3,095	2,982	50.9	4,475	1,602	73.6
Houston	6,055	3,423	2,632	56.5	3,711	2,344	61.3	4,470	1,585	73.8
Kansas City	6,058	3,413	2,645	56.3	2,932	3,126	48.4	4,425	1,633	73.0
Boston	6,226	3,485	2,741	56.0	3,134	3,092	50.3	4,345	1,881	69.8
Minnesota	6,233	3,381	2,852	54.2	3,729	2,504	59.8	4,238	1,995	68.0
Toronto	6,167	2,817	3,350	45.7	4,188	1,979	67.9	4,541	1,626	73.6
Oakland	6,245	2,756	3,489	44.1	4,505	1,740	72.1	4,399	1,846	70.4
New York	6,082	2,175	3,907	35.8	4,270	1,812	70.2	4,359	1,723	71.7
Seattle	5,977	2,061	3,916	34.5	3,898	2,079	65.2	3,889	2,088	65.1
Cleveland	6,222	1,962	4,260	31.5	4,620	1,602	74.3	4,268	1,954	68.6
AL Average	6,146	3,298	2,848	53.7	3,551	2,595	57.8	4,404	1,742	71.7

There is a lot of data here, so let’s start with an explanation. The Tigers had 6,202 plate appearances in 2014. Of those, 4,750 were by right-handed batters, including switch hitters Victor Martinez and Andrew Romine the times they batted from the right side. So, 76.6 percent of the Tigers’ plate appearances were from the right side.

Wow! As you can see, that is an extreme percentage. The next highest percentage was 64.2 percent, by the Baltimore Orioles. The Tigers had about 800 more plate appearances by right-handed hitters than the Orioles. In the American League, just over half of plate appearances were by righties, 53.7 percent, and the Indians actually had less than a third of the plate appearances come from righties.

The only pure lefty in the Tigers lineup was catcher Alex Avila (one reason they picked up his option for 2015), plus the two switch-hitters. (Romine’s switch hitting did not help; he hit .198 as a lefty against righties and .333 as a righty against lefties.)

What does that mean for the team? One thing is that, given that most pitchers are right-handed, they got the platoon advantage (a righty hitter against a lefty pitcher or a lefty against a right pitcher) less often than any other team in the league. They had 2,788 plate appearances with the platoon advantage, 45.0 percent of the total, lowest in the league. (The league average was 57.8 percent.)

(One might think that would mean other teams would avoid pitching southpaws against the Tigers, but the third set of columns show that is not true. The Tigers faced a right-handed pitcher in 72.9 percent of their

plate appearances, ninth highest in the league and just above the league average of 71.7 percent. The lesson there is that starters tend to stay in rotation and whomever comes up comes up.)

So that is why Dave Dombrowski is scouring the baseball world looking for left-handed hitters. Gose will help that percentage a bit, but he is not really a hitter of any consequence, so he will not help much in solving the problem. We expect him and Rajai Davis to platoon in center since Davis hits lefties much better than right-handers. The only position left is either left or right field (depending on where J.D. Martinez plays), and they desperately need a left-handed bat with authority out there.

DÉJÀ VU, OR HAVEN'T WE SEEN THIS BEFORE? By Todd Miller

The Cubs' recent dismissal of manager Rick Renteria after only one year on the job, and the subsequent hiring of Joe Maddon, is reminiscent of the Tigers replacing Les Moss with Sparky Anderson one-third of the way through the 1979 season.

Because winning is all that matters in the major leagues, one can't fault either team for nabbing a proven winner with an engaging personality at the expense of a nondescript "lifer" in his first big league managerial job. It will be interesting to see how the move benefits the Cubs, and where Renteria ends up.

For the record, Moss never managed again. Following his dismissal from the Tigers, the former big-league catcher, who enjoyed a 13-year career as a defensive standout -- mostly with the St. Louis Browns -- went on to be the Cubs' pitching coach (1981) and held the same position with the Astros 1982-89, helping the club win the NL West in 1986. He then worked as a minor league pitching instructor and pitching coordinator for the Astros and Giants before retiring from baseball in 1995.

At the Society's Second Annual Gathering at Carl's Chop House on June 29, 1985, Tigers President Jim Campbell, recalling the situation of six years earlier, called Moss' firing "the hardest thing I've ever had to do," adding that he and Moss still exchanged Christmas cards. Later that day, the Society contingent saw the Tigers shut out the Blue Jays, 8-0.

KING TIGER VOTING -- By David Raglin

Whether or not you liked the results of the election on November 4, it's time to vote again. Not for governor, senator, or Congress. It's time to vote for King Tiger.

Time's a-wasting, Smithers! The deadline to vote for King Tiger is fast approaching; Monday, Dec. 1 is it. So you've got the long Thanksgiving holiday weekend to ponder your choice, but don't tarry. Are you going to vote for V-Mart, now that he's back with the Tigers? How about the other Martinez, J.D.? Miggy? Or someone else?

Remember to send your vote electronically to Mark Pattison at Pattison_mark@hotmail.com, or postally to Mark Pattison, 1221 Floral St. NW, Washington, DC 20012. Remember, all entries must be received by that date; postmarks don't count. To keep your ballot from being spoiled, don't vote twice, and don't split your vote. The winner will be announced in the January 2015 issue of *Tigers Stripes*.

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