

Tigers Stripes

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PICKING THE STARTERS -- By David Raglin

Now that we have picked the starting position players for our All-Time Tiger Team, it's time to pick the five starting pitchers for our rotation.

The first thing we notice is that for a franchise that has played for almost 120 years, the Tigers have not had a lot of great starting pitchers. There are 15 people in the Hall of Fame whose primary team was the Detroit Tigers; 10 hitters, three pitchers and two managers. They have as many right fielders in the Hall (Al Kaline, Sam Crawford and Harry Heilmann) as pitchers (Hal Newhouser, Jim Bunning and, as of 2018, Jack Morris). (Yes, Bunning's Hall plaque has him wearing a Phillies hat, but he played nine of his 17 seasons with Detroit and only six with Philadelphia.) Furthermore, while several Tigers position players (Kaline, Ty Cobb and Charlie Gehringer) are among the greatest players of all time, all of the Tiger pitchers in the Hall were passed over by the writers only to be voted in by the Veterans Committee. (That will change, of course, five years after Justin Verlander retires.)

It's difficult judging the value of starting pitchers between eras because the way starting pitchers are used has changed so much over time. For example, the top two Tigers pitchers in innings pitched and wins, George Mullin and Hooks Dauss, played 100 years ago when pitchers threw many more innings. Dauss, who pitched with Detroit from 1912 to 1926, completed 245 of his 388 Tiger starts and Mullin, a Tiger from 1902 to 1913, completed 356 of 395 starts for Detroit. However, each had a league average ERA during that time, and only Mullin led the league in a positive category (wins, once). By way of contrast, Dauss led the league in earned runs allowed twice and hit batters three times, while Mullin led the league in walks four years running and earned runs three times. Clearly we cannot consider them to be among the best pitchers in team history. Notice that neither ranks extremely high in WAR despite the chance to build value by pitching so many innings.

The table below ranks the top ten Tiger starters in four categories: innings pitched, wins, ERA+, and wins above replacement (WAR). You may not be familiar with ERA+; it is simply the pitcher's ERA compared to the league average; for example, Tommy Bridges' ERA was 26 percent better than the league average during his career, and 100 means a pitcher had a league average ERA. I include wins because it a traditional statistic to rate starting pitchers, but since it is so dependent on other players (the offense and the bullpen mainly), it is not a serious analytical stat. In the list below, notice how closely wins track innings pitched.

Detroit Tiger Starting Pitchers Ranked in Innings Pitched, Wins, ERA+, and WAR

Rk	Pitcher	IP	Rk	Pitcher	W	Rk	Pitcher	ERA+	Rk	Pitcher	WAR
1	George Mullin	3394.0	1	Hooks Dauss	223	1	Hal Newhouser	130	1	Hal Newhouser	59.4
2	Hooks Dauss	3390.7	2	George Mullin	209	2	Tommy Bridges	126	2	Justin Verlander	55.8
3	Mickey Lolich	3361.7	3	Mickey Lolich	207	3	Dizzy Trout	125	3	Tommy Bridges	52.4
4	Jack Morris	3042.7	4	Hal Newhouser	200	4	Justin Verlander	123	4	Mickey Lolich	47.0
5	Hal Newhouser	2944.0	5	Jack Morris	198	5	Frank Lary	116	5	Dizzy Trout	45.3
6	Tommy Bridges	2826.3	6	Tommy Bridges	194	6	Jim Bunning	116	6	Jack Morris	38.1
7	Dizzy Trout	2591.7	7	Justin Verlander	183	7	Virgil Trucks	113	7	Hooks Dauss	36.2
8	Justin Verlander	2511.0	8	Dizzy Trout	161	8	Fred Hutchinson	113	8	George Mullin	35.1
9	Earl Whitehill	2171.3	9	Bill Donovan	140	9	Schoolboy Rowe	113	9	Bill Donovan	35.0
10	Bill Donovan	2137.3	10	Earl Whitehill	133	10	Denny McLain	110	10	Jim Bunning	29.7

I'd love to have another stat for comparison but there just are no other great stats to use. For example, FIP, Fielding Independent Pitching, attempts to adjust for defense by ignoring everything but strikeouts, walks, home runs, and hit batters, but I don't agree that balls hit in the field of play balance out.

Looking at the chart, who should make up the rotation? Newhouser is #1 in ERA+ and WAR, but two of his three great seasons came during the war (and his third great season was the first one after the war). That does not mean that he should be excluded from the team, but I'd have to start Justin Verlander on Opening Day for this team with Newhouser getting the #2 slot in the rotation. After all, as we pointed out, Newhouser was a late selection to the Hall of Fame 37 years after he retired, and Verlander will go in as soon as he is eligible, with most of his accomplishments coming with the Tigers.

My #3 starter is the player I consider the most underrated Tiger in history, Tommy Bridges. He did not have a cool nickname like contemporaries Schoolboy Rowe and Dizzy Trout, and he last pitched over seventy years ago. Bridges had an ERA at least 10 percent better than the league average in all but his second and last seasons, and seven times, his ERA was less than two-thirds of the league average. Bridges made six All-Star teams and received MVP votes in three seasons, a sign of how well he was regarded.

Bridges' first major league game was a relief appearance against the mighty Yankees in 1930. He came in for the sixth inning and faced, in order, three Hall of Famers: Babe Ruth, Tony Lazzeri, and Lou Gehrig. He got Ruth and Gehrig out, and Lazzeri's single turned out to be meaningless when Bridges got the next guy out. Despite that debut, control problems prevented him from really establishing himself until 1932. Part of that, ironically, was his great curveball, generally considered the best in the league and hard to hit but also hard to control. He never had great control, but a good fastball and changeup with the curve made him successful. On August 5, 1932, he had a perfect game against the Senators broken up with two outs in the ninth inning.

Bridges was a key member of three pennant-winning teams, in 1934, 1935, and 1940, and played a minor role in a fourth in 1945. Bridges pitched a complete game in Game 6 of the 1935 World Series clincher. It got dicey in the ninth when, in a 3-3 game, the Cubs' Stan Hack led off the ninth with a triple. However, Bridges got the next three hitters on a strikeout, a roller back to the mound, and a soft fly to left. In the bottom of the ninth, Goose Goslin's single knocked in Mickey Cochrane from second to give Detroit its first World Series championship. Bridges pitched for the Tigers until 1943 when he went into the service. He came back in late 1945 and early 1946 but he had hit the end of his major league career (although he did have three good seasons for Portland of the Pacific Coast League.) He died on April 19, 1968, in the middle of the nine-game early-season winning streak that set the tone for the 1968 champions. For more information on Bridges, you can read Scott Ferkovich's book "Motor City Champions," available here: <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/motor-city-champs-scott-ferkovich/1125487847?ean=9781476666594>, or his SABR biography by Rob Neyer, which you can find here: <https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/f8cf51bc>.

For the #4 slot, I have to go with the ol' Mick, Mickey Lolich, and that's not just because he's my favorite player of all time. Lolich is third in innings pitched and fourth in WAR among Tiger starters. He does not make the ERA+ list (he is 14th at 105) but he was a key pitcher on the 1972 Tigers that won the Eastern Division, and he certainly moves up the list for his amazing 1968 World Series performance.

For #5 it came down to Jack Morris and Dizzy Trout. Trout had a higher WAR and a much better ERA+ (125 to 108) than Morris, but like Newhouser, his best seasons came during or right after the war. Plus, Jack Morris is in the Hall of Fame while Dizzy Trout got 0.5 percent of the vote the only year he was on the ballot and he has never been mentioned as a serious Hall candidate. (Yes, some of what Morris did to get in the Hall was after he left Detroit, but most of it was as a Tiger.) We could have also considered Bunning, the other Tiger Hall of Famer, but he was a regular starter in Detroit for only seven seasons and that dooms him from making this team, like it did Mickey Cochrane behind the plate.

SHORTSTOP SHIFT – By David Raglin

Jose Iglesias was the Tigers shortstop for over five seasons (the last two months of 2013 and from 2015 to 2018). He is now a free agent and General Manager Al Avila has stated one of his major offseason goals is to find a replacement for Iggy. The plan is to go for a cheap one-year replacement at shortstop since Willi Castro, the young shortstop the Tigers got from Cleveland for Leonys Martin, will be ready by 2020 at the latest.

Basically, the Tigers are looking for the next Tito Fuentes. (Fuentes was the first free agent the Tigers ever signed, in 1977; his job was to keep second base warm before this kid named Whitaker came up.) The Tigers have been linked to several free agents to fill the role, and their 2018 stats are below:

Jose Iglesias and Potential Tiger Shortstops for 2019 (Age is as of the 2019 season)

Shortstop	Age	Tm	G	AB	R	H	HR	RBI	BA	OBP	SLG	RC	RC/G	WAR	oWAR	dWAR
Jose Iglesias	29	Det	125	432	43	116	5	48	.269	.310	.389	50	4.0	2.2	2.0	0.9
Alcides Escobar	32	KC	140	485	54	112	4	34	.231	.279	.313	28	3.1	0.8	0.4	0.9
Freddy Galvis	29	SD	162	602	62	149	13	67	.248	.299	.380	69	3.9	2.3	1.7	1.6
A. Hechavarria	30	3 Tms	94	296	34	73	6	31	.247	.279	.345	42	2.8	-0.7	0.7	-0.6
Jordy Mercer	32	Pit	117	394	43	99	6	39	.251	.315	.381	46	4.0	0.1	1.1	-0.4

This table has a wide variety of stats: the standard ones, the ones familiar to *Tiger Stripes* readers (runs created and runs created per game), and the newer ones (WAR, offensive WAR, and defensive WAR). (Note that offensive WAR plus defensive WAR does not equal total WAR because of various adjustments.) None of the shortstops are particularly good hitters, including Iglesias, who was arguably the best of them all. Freddy Galvis, who before playing for San Diego was the Phillies' regular shortstop for three seasons, is pretty consistent. Jordy Mercer had probably his worst year as a regular last year and at age 32 should be expected to decline further in 2019. Adeiny Hechavarria, who played for Tampa Bay, Pittsburgh and the Yankees last season, was a regular for the Marlins for four seasons before becoming a part-timer the past two years. Tiger fans should be familiar with Alcides Escobar since he has been the regular for the division rival Royals since 2011. He is also older and his numbers dropped in 2018.

Frankly, none of them is particularly good but all of them are serviceable to be the next Fuentes. There are not too many teams looking for placeholder shortstops this winter, which should help the Tigers find one. It could be Iglesias; if he finds no takers, he could return to Detroit.

As an aside, Buster Olney of ESPN has noted that there are a lot of free agents at second base available this year, including DJ LeMahieu, Josh Harrison, Neil Walker, Brian Dozier, Logan Forsythe, Daniel Descalso, Asdrubal Cabrera and even Ian Kinsler, and not much need for second baseman by contenders. The Tigers' regular last year, Niko Goodrum, had a very good season for a player picked up for nothing, but is probably better suited for the super-utility role the Tigers have been fond of (see Don Kelly and Andrew Romine). Don't expect Al Avila to be going after one of those guys now, especially since they also have a second baseman in waiting in Issac Paredes, but if it's February and the price is right, the Tigers could bite on a one-year deal there.

TIGERS BOOKSHELF: “The Life and Times of Ty Cobb” -- Reviewed by Mark Pattison

Norm Coleman has made a second career out of portraying Ty Cobb in a one-man show he's taken all over the United States. He's even performed before the Mayo Smith Society. Coleman now is extending his franchise to the book world with his biography of the Georgia Peach.

Coleman takes a fairly breezy approach to Cobb's life. After all, there was a lot of life to Cobb's life, and trying to squeeze in everything would test even the most skilled of biographers. Coleman's strategy is to make Cobb's life episodic, although not necessarily chronological, to show different aspects of the player and the man. As a result, “The Life and Times of Ty Cobb” features more repeated passages than the typical tome, and it's arguable whether presenting the same information in different points in Cobb's life is a benefit.

But to Coleman's credit, he has read much of the most recent biographies of Cobb and has worked in a select item or two from books (previously featured in *Stripes*) by Charles Lehrsens and Tim Hornbaker to buttress the evolving view of Cobb. For much of the past half-century, the likes of Al Stump and Daniel Okrent (with a big assist from Ken Burns) painted a picture of Ty Cobb as an insolent, short-tempered racist with his baseball brilliance his sole redeeming quality -- and even that seemed to be grudgingly conceded. But Coleman spends a greater percentage of his 176-page book on Cobb's upbringing and linking Cobb to his educated and well-respected father, and also to his anti-slavery ancestors.

Correcting the historical record, though, doesn't extend to stats. While most of the baseball world has accepted that Ty had only 4,189 base hits ("only"?), Coleman still lists Cobb with 4,191. While this kind of error isn't fatal, if one is going to strive for accuracy, it should be in all areas. I would recommend this biography as a "starter bio" for kids and grandkids. There's no foul language in the pages, and there are great vignettes they'll be able to absorb at their level. "The Life and Times of Ty Cobb" is available for \$12.95.

KING TIGER VOTING CONTINUES -- By Mark Pattison

When the Mayo Smith Society began awarding King Tiger with the 2004 season, we wanted to differentiate our prize from other Tiger-of-the-year/player-of-the-year awards by telling our electorate to consider both his ON-field and OFF-field performance. The Tigers, in its 2018 season summary published in mid-October, featured several Tigers and their roles in the community. We excerpt them here.

Niko Goodrum purchased nearly 2,000 cases of water that were delivered to community partners in both Detroit and Flint. ... Nicholas Castellanos and Shane Greene donated funds to purchase art supplies for the art therapy program at Children's Hospital of Michigan, and launch a new program, "Painting the Future," in which a trained art therapist will work with children of all ages during their hospital stay to help with emotional expression. ... Matthew Boyd and his wife, Ashley, pledged a donation of \$100,000 to Kingdom Home, a nonprofit organization they started to provide a home of refuge, restoration and hope for children in need in Uganda. The Boyds also partnered with Alternatives for Girls in Detroit, which helps homeless and high-risk girls and young women avoid violence, teen pregnancy and exploitation. ... Michael Fulmer served as the Tigers' representative for the American Cancer Society's Real Men Wear Pink Metro Detroit Campaign, which raised over \$123,000 in 2017 and is continuing through this fall; Fulmer's mother-in-law died of breast cancer. ... The Cabrera Family Scholarship, established by Miguel and Rosangel Cabrera created a permanent endowment with the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan valued at nearly \$250,000, which now awards two renewable college scholarships to first-generation college students. Cabrera also hosted the 10th Annual Keeping Kids in the Game event, which raised over \$220,000 to support children's health and youth baseball, while also hosting over 200 parents and family members from the Children's Hospital of Michigan and University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital for a night at Comerica Park. ... Boyd, Castellanos, Fulmer, JaCoby Jones, Mikie Mahtook, James McCann, Daniel Norris and Jordan Zimmermann partnered with the Detroit Tigers Foundation to raise money for local and national charities through Autographs for a Cause, in which players signed limited edition Topps baseball cards in exchange for a donation to benefit a charity of the players' choice, with each player matching the funds raised.

Jason Beck recently had a nice piece on Tiger player charitable activities you might want to check out: https://www.mlb.com/tigers/news/matthew-boyd-tigers-give-back-at-thanksgiving/c-300946972?tcid=fb_article_300946972&fbclid=IwAR03Tbmsu7CwmXLblEOpwUbEXQfloEZYr24bRD_dsXSe-GL9H0uacNs9S-Q

So, just like everyone else was exhorting about the midterms, now is your time to vote. Votes will be accepted through Dec. 18. Vote by email at pattison_mark@hotmail.com (put "King Tiger" in the subject line) or by postal mail to Mark Pattison, 1221 Floral St. NW, Washington, DC 20012.

For Mayo Smith Society memberships

send \$20 (US\$23 out of the US) to: Mayo Smith Society, PO Box 119, Northville, MI 48167

For Detroit Tigers 1984: What a Start!

What a Finish!, autographed by authors David Raglin and Mark Pattison, send \$20 to: Mark Pattison, 1221 Floral St. NW, Washington, DC 20012

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