

Thoughts on the Tigers

About this time every year I am asked about my thoughts on the Tigers going into the new season. I typically say they are going to win the World Series because I am the ultimate optimist and have Tiger blood running through my veins! Last year was the first time that I was asked to truly give my opinion and apparently many of our clients enjoyed the message so...Here we go again.

I was impressed with the players that played last year, but this year is a big time WOW! The Tigers have six starting pitchers, a line-up of hitters that create havoc on opposing pitching staffs, and a bullpen that collectively should do a fine job. In our business, we are trained to utilize our analytic skills to determine what could go wrong then weigh those results against what could go right and then decide what our final opinion is. Well, I have shared what looks fabulous on paper, but baseball isn't played on paper - So let's take a look at what could go wrong:

Team speed - Speed, just like last year, is a major concern that I have. Again, the only every-day player who can steal a base is Austin Jackson. Austin has been working on his base stealing, but it remains to be seen if he can steal a base when everyone in the ballpark knows that is what he is going to do. I don't see that happening and as a result, the Tigers truly don't have anyone who is a base stealer. Omar Infante can certainly run, but can he steal a base when it is expected that he is going to make an attempt? At this time, I don't have the confidence in him. Quinton Berry might be that guy; however, he isn't playing every day and was not on the opening day roster. I certainly hope they find a spot

for him because when he plays something crazy happens. Something that typically is good for the team.

Starting pitching - This is a major strength. I will repeat... Experts say a team can't win it all with all right-handed starters, but as a reminder the 1984 World Champion Tigers were in first place from day one until the final out of the World Series. And we got that far with nothing but right-handed starting pitching. The Tigers have the following starters: Verlander, Scherzer, Fister, Sanchez, Porcello, and Smyly. The one left hander in the group, Smyly, is considered the Tigers 6th starting pitcher. Teams only use five starting pitchers so it appears that Smyly will be used out of the bull pen as a long-relief pitcher and a spot starter. The starting pitching will eat up a lot of innings but I predict that Smyly will get enough work in to be effective as the season progresses. I have questioned if he would be better off pitching in Toledo for the first month of the season to get his work in.

Bullpen - This has been a hot topic all winter and it carried over through spring training. My belief is that their bullpen is going to be just fine even though they haven't given the title of "stopper" to anyone at this point. Bruce Rondon has been thought of as a guy who could eventually get this title, but up until now, he hasn't proven that he can handle the job description. The job description is: Short-term memory, can pitch on consecutive days, no fear, and one who truly believes that he will get the job done every time he steps on the mound. My opinion, he isn't quite ready yet. Jim Leyland has said that he may use someone in

summaries

his bullpen on any given day to be the “stopper”. This will create a very interesting beginning of the season.

Defense - The team has improved with the signing of Tori Hunter to play right field, Miguel Cabrera having a year under his belt at third base and Omar Infante as the everyday second baseman. The defense should be better than average, but there are still a few question marks that will be answered as the season progresses. The outfield should be very solid, but the infield still has a few question marks. Jhonny Peralta arrived to spring training trimmed down about 20 pounds in hopes that he would be able to move a little quicker at shortstop. For me, Peralta may not have the range of some of the other shortstops in the league, but when he gets his hands in a play, he completes it. The corners (1st and 3rd base) are interesting as they, being Cabrera and Fielder, are considered average at best at their respective positions. Lastly, can Avila stay healthy behind the plate? He continues to work hard during the off season to get ready for the grind of the major league season, but the last two years have been pretty rough on his body and it showed in the postseason.

Sport fanatics all have opinions and that is what makes each sport so exciting for the fans and the players. The press's job is to write their opinion on what they see and think while also having the responsibility to sell papers. I do not agree with many of the things that are said or printed, but this year, so far, has been much more positive than negative. Last year I commented that the 2012 Tigers were the best team that I have seen since the 1984 Tigers. This year the Tigers are much better than that team (on paper) and we will have to wait to see if they can get over these humps to even be mentioned with the 1968 and 1984 Tigers.

So let's take a look at what could go right:

Defense - The defense makes all the routine plays day in, day out. This year, in my humble opinion, Jim Leyland won't have to go to his bench for late-inning defensive replacements. He will now have the luxury of using his bench whenever he wants. Don Kelly is a defensive specialist and I believe he can flat out hit if give 250 at bats. Ramon Santiago is a defensive specialist who can give Peralta and Infante a day off once in a while. Berry can give Hunter a breather now and then, which will help Hunter to stay strong through the entire season. The backup catcher, Brayan Peña, will need to step up and be able to call a game for the pitchers so that they are totally comfortable giving Avila a day off.

Starting Pitching - The fifth starting pitcher, Porcello, has another year under his belt. Let me remind you that he is still a puppy (23 years old). I have spent some time talking with him and he is a very impressive young man. He knows what he needs to do to improve and he will do it. The other four starters have proven themselves and there isn't a need to elaborate. That being said, we may have another Verlander in the starting rotation. Who might that be? I am suggesting that Scherzer could be that guy who competes with Verlander all season. He has the stuff to do it, but can he stay healthy?

Bullpen - This bullpen has some major power arms and it looks like there will be two left-handed relief pitchers. There are still a few question marks and the biggest one is Al Alburquerque. When he is “on”, his is unhittable. His slider is unhittable and his fastball travels in the mid-90s. However, if he can't command any of those pitches he can get himself into trouble. The same goes with Brayan

Villarreal. I do not believe both will be going North with the team, but before the season is over, one or both of them will be a key for the Tigers bullpen. Rondon needs to grow up really fast and it wouldn't surprise if Leyland uses him selectively at the beginning of the season. These three relief pitchers have tremendous arms and all three have pitches that are unhittable. The rest of the bull pen consists of veteran pitchers and the only one that concerns me is Joaquin Benoit. He seemed to falter at the end of the 2012 season and it appeared to me that he lost his confidence and command of his pitches. He has a rubber arm and is a key for the bullpen. My concern is will he be able to get back to his old form. But, because I am the ultimate optimist, I believe he will get there.

Key Bench Player - Matt Tuiasosopo is going to be a key player for the bench. He can spell off Andy Dirks in left field when a tough left-handed starting pitcher is up that game. He also adds versatility to the field, being able to play other positions well. Dirks has been showing some signs of needing time to rest since last year. He will play on a regular basis, but I am not convinced that he is able to play every day. That isn't saying a negative about Dirks, I just feel he will need a breather, more than most, in order to stay healthy.

Batting Lineup - *What a lineup!!* There are not holes in the Tigers lineup from the first hitter to number nine. The fact that Victor Martinez is back and healthy may be the best thing that has happened to this team since last year. He was missed terribly both on and off the field. He is a born leader who can talk to each player in that locker room. They need a person like Martinez because some of the other stars just don't have that desire to lead. Many of them say they lead by example and that is great, but it

is also beneficial to have someone who leads by example and can be a leader in the locker room. Martinez is that guy! He has always been that way- the players respect him, the manager and coaches respect him, and the front office truly appreciates his leadership.

Team speed? Who cares! - With that offensive lineup they will score more runs than 90% of the teams in all of baseball. Bat control and power should rule the day in 2013. What is bat control? Let me attempt to explain. If Leyland puts on a hit and run (on base player(s) steals and the hitter must put the ball in play) the batter is able to put the ball in play on a regular basis. The Tigers "non- power guys" can do this. This is a scary lineup and many starting pitchers on the opposing team might not get a good night's sleep the night before.

One last comment that many will consider very biased, but that is ok. The team now has a new third base coach and I know he will do a great job. This is not a knock at all against Gene Lamont, because he was a great third base coach. His name is Tom Brookens and I am so happy that he is a part of the Tiger Major League Team, because he has the total package to be a great manager someday. The fact that he now will be patrolling the third base coaching box will look nice on his resume, but more importantly his baseball instincts will prevail and he will show all of us that he can do the job. "Brookie" has the ability to relate to the players and he has a great sense of humor, but when it is time to go to work, he will put on his game face and he will be ready to do his job! He is a fan favorite, player's favorite and one of my favorites.

Well, now that I have shared my opinion, I can only hope that the Tigers don't win the League Championship series

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interactive creative local independent personal
knowledgeable thoughtful ethical experienced

in four games and have a long layoff before the start of the World Series. If the baseball gods are on our side, this won't happen again and I will predict that the Tigers will win the World Series in 6 games!

Enjoy the summer and be great Detroit Tiger fans!
Dave Bergman

As we mentioned in our January newsletter, 2013 is Sigma's 40th Anniversary year. In honor of this, our employees are sharing personal "Sigma Stories" with you each month. We hope you enjoy!

You Say Tomato – I Say Tomahto

My "Sigma" story varies a bit from the others that you have read about over the past few months. I did not apply to work here. I was brought in kicking and screaming! (Not really, but you'll see why I was less than thrilled.) I had two children and was pregnant with my third when I was informed that I was going to be the new "bookkeeper" and that I was not going to be paid for that prestigious position. The "perk", I could work from home. (My "boss" has always been a generous man 😊)

Of course I had to be trained first, which meant a trip into the office. At that point in time the office was located in Grosse Pointe. I was born and raised on the west side of Detroit and I knew absolutely nothing about the east side. I had been to the office on a few occasions but since I was not the driver, I paid absolutely no attention to where I was going. I was given verbal instructions, which I wrote down, so that I could proceed with assumed ease on my first solo voyage into Grosse Pointe. I was to follow I-94 East and get off at the Cadieux exit. Now in my mind, the upcoming sign that said Cadieux was pronounced Cad - e - ux, not Cajew. So I passed right by Cad-e-ux and ended up in Timbuktu. Of course this was back in the days before the invention of cell phones and GPS. I eventually found my way but it took me a while.

I've been here for 25 years (I now get paid!) and counting. My responsibilities have changed a bit over the years as my children have grown and left the nest. My "boss" is also my best friend (and husband 😊), so I truly enjoy going into work every day. I am blessed to work with the people that I do. They are kind, caring and fun individuals. I am fortunate to have met a number of Sigma's wonderful clients, many of whom I now call friend. I guess you could say that I truly like my job! At this rate, I don't think that I am going to retire until I'm 102 😊.

Shari Bilkie

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