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Friday, September 16, 2011

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Tigers lose; Jim Leyland defends march to cusp of division title

September 16, 2011

By Drew Sharp / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND -- Maybe now Jim Leyland and batting coach Lloyd McClendon can finally change their underwear. The pair remained hygienically challenged during the Tigers' remarkable 12-game winning streak. As long as they won games, so what if they lost friends.

Leyland was half-jokingly asked if the overused underwear might actually stand on its own.

"Yeah, I would say that's a possibility," he laughed. "The problem was that I only brought one other pair on the trip."

The Tigers couldn't capitalize on their first opportunity to clinch their first division title in 24 years, but it certainly wasn't cause for sulking. After 12 games, they were due for a night like this. How could anyone possibly complain after averaging nearly eight runs during the streak that those explosive bats finally fell silent against Oakland's Brandon McCarthy?

The champagne will eventually flow here in the bowels of dilapidated Oakland-Alameda Coliseum. Grown men will pivot between cheering and crying, the impulsive response to a long grind meeting its deserved reward.

When the stadium scoreboard stamped an "F" to the Texas 7-4 victory over Cleveland, a number of the Tigers standing on the top step of their dugout pumped fists and exchanged high-fives.

They had clinched a tie for the division title.

The Tigers' fans behind their dugout that far, far, far outnumbered those reluctant to still refer to themselves as A's fans exploded into a chant of "Let's Go Tigers." And though the Tigers trailed in the late innings, who really didn't think that there was another stirring comeback left in them to keep that winning streak alive through another day?

They should party. They will party.

But all should also understand that the AL Central championship is no longer the finish line for this team.

Not after this September.

It was inevitable that the impending Tigers' coronation would result in questions regarding the state of the kingdom.

A national baseball writer asked Leyland before the game Thursday night if the 12-game streak was somewhat diminished because it came at the paws of flea-addled divisional competition.

Leyland immediately pounced. Despite declarations that he wouldn't bite on the question, he not only bit. He chewed and spat it back out.

"I will not let anybody take anything away from what those guys in there have done," Leyland barked.

And nobody should.

The reason the AL Central is the only division with a second-place team under .500 is because the Tigers stormed through the division this month like Sherman marched through Georgia, leaving behind only ashen remnants. They should celebrate the conquest.

But Leyland understands that as much as they've earned and deserve this divisional championship, they can't think they've accomplished everything simply by silencing those critics who thought they would fritter away another September. If this team is as good as they think, clinching the AL Central is merely a start. Perhaps that served as part of the motivation for his expletive-laced tirade against the reporter.

"Everyone was saying (the White Sox) were (bleeping) good," Leyland said. "Now, all of a sudden, because we've beaten them they're horse (bleep). That's not fair. That's unfair. ... If you think the Central is horse(bleep), then write that it's horse(bleep). But I'm not falling for that (bleep)."

It was calculated anger on Leyland's part.

The manager's office here is only a modest tobacco spit from the players' clubhouse. It's a certainty that players heard their manager vociferously defending their achievement against the perception that the Tigers are simply the best of a bad litter.

"I guarantee you one thing," Leyland said. "This you can print. It's not like everybody's lining up to play the Tigers. We are pretty good, too."

They have the best divisional record of the six divisional leaders. The Tigers are 25 games over .500 against the AL Central (46-21). Milwaukee has the next best percentage -- 19 games over .500 within the NL Central (45-26). Of course, the NL Central is the only division with six teams and one of them has the worst record in all baseball -- Houston with 98 losses already.

The Tigers are one game below .500 against everybody else.

And that means absolutely nothing. The only number that matters now is the magic number, and that's reduced to a tantalizingly close one game.

Though Leyland can finally change his undergarments without risking the ire of the superstition gods, he won't let go of the Montecristo cigars just yet. They were a gift from a gentleman who won a "Manager of the Day" bid during Carlos Guillen's recent charity auction.

The Tigers kept winning. So he kept smoking the cigars.

Something tells me that he'll very soon have reason for lighting one up in celebration.

Oakland 6, Detroit 1: Tigers' epic winning streak ends

But Indians' loss puts Detroit step closer to title

September 16, 2011

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Jim Leyland can change his underwear now. And throw out the pair he's been wearing for much of the 12-game winning streak.

He might smoke a little more of the cigar he's been lighting up for days. After all, we're talking about a \$40 Montecristo.

Leyland can give superstition a rest — at least for a night — because his Tigers lost a game for the first time in almost two weeks Thursday at the O.Co Coliseum. The A's knocked off Detroit, 6-1, holding the Tigers to its lowest offensive output since the Angels beat them, 5-1, on July 30.

Detroit has been on a roll since then, going 31-11. This is why the Tigers had a chance to wrap up the division title on its first night of a four-game series. (Chicago and Cleveland both lost — eliminating the White Sox from playoff contention and reducing the Tigers' magic number to one against the Indians).

The Tigers had been winning so regularly and in so many ways that the loss seemed almost jarring.

“Credit their pitcher,” Tigers manager Jim Leyland said of Brandon McCarthy.

The right-hander flummoxed Detroit all night with a looping curve and good fastball. He held the Tigers to just five hits and one run — a solo homer from Delmon Young.

Max Scherzer, meanwhile, couldn't keep the ball inside the park. He gave up three homers, including a three-run shot in the first inning.

“That's what happens when the pitch is in the middle (of the plate),” Scherzer said.

Scherzer was looking for his 15th win. More importantly, he was looking to help the team clinch its first division title since 1987.

“Obviously, you are aware of the situation,” he said, “at the same time, no external surroundings (affected) my game tonight.”

He said he just made mistakes. McCarthy didn't make as many.

Said Leyland: “We just got beat. People think we didn't do something. Their guy pitched really good. That's the way I look at this game. We were ready to play.”

Such expectations come with otherworldly runs. The last time the Tigers put together so many wins without a loss was 1934. Can you blame anyone for thinking they would just keep winning?

The A's didn't, apparently, and let the Tigers know it in the bottom of the first inning.

Coco Crisp led off with a single — three batters later, David DeJesus smacked a three-run homer and Detroit never really threatened the rest of the way.

Miguel Cabrera led off the sixth with a double, but he stayed at second after Victor Martinez, Alex Avila and Jhonny Peralta all flied out.

So many times during the winning streak the Tigers got the hit or pitch it needed. Wednesday in Chicago, Detroit overcame a three-run hole in the top of the ninth inning. But winning streaks are a product of timeliness as much as skill and fortitude.

Leyland said before the game that he'd never been part of a run quite like it. What he took most pride in was that when the streak started, both Chicago and Cleveland were still within reach. They knocked off the White Sox six times and swept the Indians in three games to take command of the division race at a critical time.

“That, to me, makes it a pretty impressive streak,” he said.

He and his club have a chance to begin another one tonight. Either a loss by Cleveland or a win by Detroit clinches the division. If one or the other happens, Leyland will celebrate -- in clean underwear. No doubt he can find another Montecristo.

Leyland's underwear, socks are Tigers' lucky charms?

September 16, 2011

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Jim Leyland hasn't changed his underwear in a while. And he doesn't care who knows it. "I'm superstitious," he said Thursday before the game against the Athletics.

Leyland can't pinpoint exactly how many days he has been wearing the same pair of underwear. All he knows is that sometime early in the 12-game winning streak, he thought: "We won. I'm not going to change them."

Or wash them.

No matter what happens to them.

Leyland admitted to a few superstitious patterns lately. He has worn the same pair of baseball socks during games for a while, too, despite the plum-size hole in the heel.

"I told Schmakel (Jim Schmakel, the Tigers' clubhouse manager) that if somebody threw them out, that would be the end," Leyland said.

Presumably he meant the end of the team's mojo. Still, Leyland isn't taking any unnecessary chances.

So he continues to smoke a cigar every day. Not because he is celebrating, but because he was given a box recently, felt obligated to light one up and figured since the team won that day, he should continue to smoke them.

Every day, he takes a few puffs then puts it out.

"I'm not a big cigar guy," he said.

Yet he has had part of one for the past eight days.

"I hope to smoke them for about another 40," he said.

Though he doesn't attribute his recent behavior to the team's recent rampage, he did acknowledge that he has "never been through a streak like this before ... (but) I'm proud of it."

PITCHING UPDATE: Leyland said he was going to shut down Al Alburquerque for the four-game Oakland series and hopes the reliever will be ready to pitch Tuesday in Kansas City. Alburquerque is getting treatment for a sore hip.

Tigers notes from loss to Athletics

September 16, 2011

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

AT O.CO COLISEUM, OAKLAND, CALIF.

WHAT HAPPENED: The A's jumped on the Tigers in the first inning — smacking a three-run homer and never looking back. Brandon McCarthy held Detroit to five hits and struck out eight. Max Scherzer allowed three home runs. Detroit's magic number to clinch the AL Central is one.

ROAD WOES: Scherzer was looking for his 15th win of the season on the road, but the road hasn't been as kind a place to him. His ERA is 5.33 on the road compared to 3.66 at home.

COOLING OFF: Austin Jackson is 4-for-38 (.105) in his last 10 games. Jackson struck out three times Thursday.

OH, THAT BULLPEN: Duane Below and Duane Pauley combined for three innings. Each allowed a hit and Below walked two. Pauley gave up an unearned run and struck out two. While he was pitching, a boisterous fan kept yelling, "Pauley want a cracker?"

THEY SAID IT: Jim Leyland: "We were thinking: keep playing like we have been and we might get ourselves into a spot where we get a shot."

Oakland 6, Detroit 1: Tigers' win streak snapped; magic number down to one

September 16, 2011

By Kirkland Crawford / Detroit Free Press

Max Scherzer gave up five runs on three home runs and the Tigers' winning streak was ended at 12 after losing to the Athletics, 6-1, tonight in Oakland, Calif.

Detroit's magic number to clinch the American League Central division is down to one after the Indians fell to the Rangers in Texas tonight.

Brandon McCarthy shut down the Tigers, going seven innings and allowing an earned run on five hits, two walks and a hit batter on 104 pitches while striking out eight.

Coco Crisp had three hits, including an RBI double, and David DeJesus, Kurt Suzuki and Cliff Pennington all homered.

The A's scored first in the first inning. Crisp got things going with a leadoff single to center. Pennington hit a grounder up the middle which was fielded by shortstop Jhonny Peralta, who tagged second and threw to first, seemingly in time, but Pennington was ruled safe. After Hideki Matsui's foul out to third, Josh Willingham walked, setting the table for DeJesus, who hit a three-run homer to right-center.

In the second inning, Suzuki hit a leadoff home run to left-center.

Delmon Young got the Tigers on the board in the third inning with a leadoff home run to left-center. But that was all Detroit could muster against McCarthy, who gave up just one extra-base hit (Miguel Cabrera double in the sixth) and retired 14 of 15 batters from the third to the seventh innings.

Scherzer (14-9) seemed to settle down after giving up the four runs in the first two innings, striking out the side in the third. But in the fifth, Pennington hit Scherzer's 79th pitch over the wall in right-center for a solo home run.

The Tigers starter went five innings and gave up seven hits and a walk on 91 pitches. He had eight strikeouts. Detroit sent Duane Below in to pitch in the sixth and he worked out of a jam and didn't yield a run after a single and a walk. He gave up a walk to start the seventh inning and was pulled in favor of David Pauley, who retired the next three hitters.

Pauley and the Tigers gave up an unearned run in the eighth after Brandon Allen reached on a ground ball to first which was bobbed by Cabrera for an error. Allen got to second on a walk and to third on a double play, and scored on Crisp's double to center.

Grant Balfour came in for the A's in the eighth and got three outs on just eight pitches. Oakland closer Andrew Bailey pitched the ninth and got three outs on just six pitches.

Former Tiger Scott Sizemore, whom Detroit dealt to Oakland in exchange for since-released reliever David Purcey, had a single in four at bats and struck out twice.

Boasting balance and an ace, Tigers are the real deal

September 16, 2011

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif.— Can the Tigers get to the World Series? Now why would you even ask?

Of course they can.

If there's any byproduct from how they've played in September, it's the realization they can't be counted out. On the heels of what is sure to be their first division championship since 1987, the Tigers have made us rethink all the possibilities this month.

This is not a team that has tiptoed into the postseason. It is one that still is charging into the postseason.

If there's anyone thinking they're simply the best of a bad division, chances are at this late date they can't be convinced otherwise.

But the fact is only the strong are capable of blowing away competition to the extent the Tigers have.

It's one thing to volley back and forth through July with upstarts, such as the Indians, and with teams that should have played better than they did, such as the White Sox.

It's something entirely different to win your division, or any division, as convincingly as the Tigers will win the AL Central.

Never mind why the others came up short, it only matters now that atop the division is a team of legitimate quality.

The Tigers are that team.

They aren't in the postseason as a team worthy of praise, but looking outmanned, as often has happened with the Twins. Taking nothing away from the Twins, who overachieved for years, but they didn't always match up well against their postseason foes.

The Tigers will, however.

Don't call them underdogs

No matter who they play in the division series, the Tigers should be favored.

For that matter, it even can be said if they win their division series, they'll match up well against their opponent in the AL Championship Series.

The more appropriate question could be, "Does anyone match up well with them?"

If that's not what their possible opponents — Yankees, Red Sox and Rangers — are thinking, they soon will be. Here's why you should argue with anyone who says they'd be surprised if the Tigers get to the World Series (and we don't even have to talk about hitting and pitching yet):

First of all, they are fresh. Winning is such tonic for players that it masks fatigue. The Tigers have been having too much fun to get tired.

Alex Avila, for instance, has had a huge workload behind the plate, but except for a slump in July, and the various aches and pains that he successfully shakes off every day, you couldn't tell from how he's playing he's leading American League catchers in innings played.

Miguel Cabrera isn't tired, either. Neither is Victor Martinez. No one is.

It's losing that wears out a team.

Manager Jim Leyland confounded his critics for much of the season by giving many of his regulars periodic rests. But who's confounded now? Instead of the Tigers looking tired in September, they've had the energy to sweep series after series.

Balance is another trait of the Tigers that doesn't get enough attention. The position players complement each other. They're a team that can stack the lineup either way.

If they find themselves up against Yankees left-hander CC Sabathia in the postseason, for example, they have enough switch hitters, along with the right-handed hitters they usually play, to give Sabathia a tough time.

But with Martinez, Wilson Betemit and Avila from the left side, plus Ramon Santiago or Carlos Guillen at second, the Tigers can make it difficult on right-handers as well.

Not only that, but there's a simpler truth than that: When a hitter as formidable and productive as Cabrera is the core of your offense, you won't often be shut down by either right-handers or left-handers.

Ace in the hole

It's no secret, of course, the individual reasons the Tigers have gotten this far, and could advance much farther, begin with Justin Verlander.

Not every World Series team has an identifiable ace, but most do. And if the Tigers get beyond what they've already accomplished, it's safe to think a large percentage of the reason will be Verlander.

You know the season he's had. We don't have to repeat the numbers. Besides, what we're talking about is that which the Tigers still might achieve, not what they've statistically already done.

But, if the postseason is anything like the regular season, what the Tigers might achieve gets its thrust from Verlander being the most dominant pitcher in the league.

If Verlander stays sharp, who knows, he might just find himself in a Game 1 World Series showdown against Roy Halladay of the Phillies.

A plausible thought, wouldn't you say?

But again, let's leave it that the Tigers can get there, not that they will. There will be caveats along the way, the first one being the length of time between clinching a postseason spot and the postseason itself.

The Tigers will think, feel and say all the right things about keeping their edge between now and then, but they can't just intend to.

Plus their first-round opponent might be a team that has had to scratch and claw until the last game to get in.

And teams finishing the season with such focus often benefit from entering the postseason with the same mentality.

But the reasons it's fair to say the Tigers are capable of advancing beyond the first round are valid, especially the biggest reason:

They're a darn good team that appears to be realizing at the right time just how special it can be.

Anybody playing them could be in for an extremely difficult time.

Tigers lose, but magic number shrinks to one

September 16, 2011

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — Then there was one.

The Tigers lost Thursday night, but took a giant stride forward all the same. They are so close now to clinching the American League Central, their next victory will do it.

So will the next Cleveland Indians loss.

As for the Chicago White Sox, forget about it. They were eliminated.

Either way, on a night their 12-game winning streak ended with a 6-1 defeat to the Oakland Athletics, the Tigers saw their magic number cut to one.

So there was no moaning about the streak ending. There was only the awareness of being on the brink of winning the division.

And the excitement about clean clothes.

"Kind of good news, bad news," said manager Jim Leyland. "The bad news is we lost. The good news is I can change my underwear," which, as a superstition, he hadn't changed since the early days of the winning streak. Besides, the streak — as impressive as it was — was bound to end sooner or later.

"The thing that impressed me was that a lot of it happened against the White Sox and Indians, the two teams right behind us, at a critical time of the season," said Leyland.

"But that's over with and we're trying to get to the finish line."

They're only a step away.

The Indians lost in Texas, reducing their "tragic" number to one. And the White Sox were ousted by losing in Kansas City, meaning it won't take much for the Tigers to reach the postseason for the first time since 2006.

And to win their division for the first time since 1987, and the first time

And to win the Central for the first time since joining the division in 1998.

It could even happen before the Tigers win again. If the Indians lose Friday at Minnesota, the Tigers will clinch before the final out of their game against the Athletics.

That's how it went Thursday night. By the third inning, the Tigers knew their magic number was down to one.

"I think we'd rather do it ourselves, though," said Brandon Inge.

By the third inning, they also knew they were three runs down to the A's.

One loss, though, doesn't make it any less impressive how the Tigers bulldozed their way to the brink of a playoff spot — knocking off every team daring to get in their way.

A month ago, their lead in the Central was three games. Even when it grew to a season-high 4 1/2 games Aug. 21, they could not break through the resistance level.

On Sept. 2, the lead was 5 1/2 games.

From that point on, however, the Tigers have taken off, going about the business of making it clear which team is the Central's best.

"I'm not counting my chickens, but we've earned where we're at," Leyland said.

What was different about Thursday's game wasn't the way the Tigers fell behind early, but that they didn't eventually overcome the deficit — as they've made a habit of doing.

"We were ready to play," said Leyland. "We just got beat."

The A's jumped on Max Scherzer for three runs in the first inning — courtesy of David DeJesus' home run.

They added another in the second on Kurt Suzuki's solo shot, and yet another on Cliff Pennington's home run in the fifth.

Scherzer was not distracted, however, by the thought one more victory would set off a Tigers' celebration.

"Nothing external affected my game at all," he said. "I just made a few mistakes."

The A's muffed a chance later in the second inning to turn a four-run lead into six by stranding runners at second and third after putting them there with no outs. Instead of adding to their lead, the A's saw their advantage sliced to three on Delmon Young's home run in the third.

Young's home run looked like it might trigger to another comeback. It didn't.

Scherzer struck out eight in the five innings he lasted but allowed all five runs. His record fell to 14-9.

However, the step the Tigers took toward clinching was far more significant

Detroit News staff predictions: How the Tigers will fare in the playoffs

September 16, 2011

By The Detroit News Staff / The Detroit News

How far will the Tigers go?

Tom Gage: It's been a fun ride — and it's not going to stop any time soon. Not with the division series, anyway. Justin Verlander gives the Tigers a huge advantage in a short series, so they'll beat anybody they face in the division series. They'll also have more pitching depth than anybody they'll face in the Championship Series. So here's what they're going to do: The Tigers not only can, but will get to the World Series.

Lynn Henning: They can storm into the World Series as easily as 2006 and for the same fundamental reason: Their pitching is solid enough to win a short series. The offense holds its own because so many of the players hit good pitching. Playoffs are always a coin flip, but the Tigers can beat good teams because they're a good team. Winning the World Series is a tougher task — unless someone stops the Phillies.

Bob Wojnowski: The Tigers are the hottest team with the best pitcher, two of the best hitters, one of the best closers and one of the deepest lineups. Justin Verlander automatically gives them a chance and Miguel Cabrera is an overlooked MVP candidate. But it's No. 2 starter Doug Fister who could be the difference in the playoffs. Prediction: Tigers win the AL pennant and lose in the World Series to the Phillies in 6.

John Niyo: I picked 'em to win 85 or 86 games and miss the playoffs, so they've already exceeded my expectations. The bats are hot, the depth is excellent and Justin Verlander's primed for the spotlight. (I still say this team's ultimate fate rests on the arm of Max Scherzer as much as anyone, though.) I think they get by the wild-card team — Red Sox or Rays — but I'll take the Yankees over the Tigers in the ALCS.

Tony Paul: A month ago, the answer would have been, "As far as Justin Verlander will take them." Clearly, that's not the case anymore. This team is rolling. But will the Tigers have anything left for October? Can't see why not. They just might be the most balanced AL team heading to the postseason — with clutch hitting, a dynamite top of the rotation, and a lock-down bullpen. So I see them getting to the World Series, where the Phillies will be a tough test, one that's just too tough to overcome.

Jim Leyland defends Tigers' success

September 16, 2011

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif.— With his feet up on his desk, and his daily cigar in the ashtray as part of the superstitions he's observing, manager Jim Leyland was both relaxed and not.

The anticipation of what the night might bring was almost palpable. That's because, going into their game against the A's, the Tigers had reduced the magic numbers over the White Sox and Indians to one and two respectively.

But for as much levity as there was in the manager's office before Thursday night's game — with Leyland discussing how he hadn't changed his underwear during the winning streak "and I don't care who knows it", he said — there was a question from a national writer (Jorge Ortiz from USA Today) which abruptly changed the tenor.

The question, not asked in a confrontational way, was about the quality, or lack of it, in the American League Central.

Reacting to it like a bull to a red cape, Leyland charged back verbally, defending his team and what it has accomplished.

"Let me remind you of something," Leyland said. "It was three months ago, two months ago, that the Cleveland Indians were the talk of baseball. Everybody was saying they were pretty good.

"Now all of a sudden, because we beat them, they're bad? That's not fair. I'm not falling for that.

"The Central is the division we play in. Nobody is going to take anything away from my team. When they had to step it up, they stepped it up.

"Nobody can take that away from us. I'm not going to let anybody put a damper on what those guys have done.

"We have a pitcher out there with 23 wins. We have a guy with 40-some saves. We have three or four guys hitting .300. We have an All-Star catcher and other All-Stars. We're OK."

Leyland wasn't finished.

"I can't help what happened with the White Sox and Cleveland. But I'm not going to get sucked into the division being bad so that when you play other divisions, you're going to have trouble.

"We might. We might not. But I guarantee you one thing, and this you can print. It's not like everyone is lining up to play the Tigers. We're pretty good, too.

"I'm not going to let anybody take away from what this team has done up to this point — and we really haven't done enough yet. I'm not counting my chickens.

"But don't give me that bull about the Central. I'm not going to answer silly questions and to me, that's a silly question.

"The Central is what it is. That's the division we play in. Right now, we have the best record in the Central and we've earned where we're at. That's the way I look at it."

Around the horn

Relief pitcher Al Alburquerque has been shut down for the Oakland series that runs through Sunday, to give him more time to get over a nagging hip issue.

... Tigers pitching prospect Drew Smyly will help represent the United States at the IBAF Baseball World Cup and the Pan American Games. Smyly, who went 11-6 with a 2.07 ERA during the 2011 season, plays for the Erie SeaWolves, a Detroit Tigers double-A affiliate.

Tigers at Athletics

First pitch: 10:07 p.m., tonight, Oakland Coliseum

TV/radio: FSD/1270 and 97.1

Scouting report

Doug Fister (8-13, 3.06 ERA), Tigers: He's been superb with a 5-1 record since coming to Detroit.

Trevor Cahill (11-13, 4.32 ERA), Athletics: Right-hander has had a rough stretch since All-Star break.

Tigers coach Lloyd McLendon won't change underwear until win streak ends

September 16, 2011

By The Detroit News Staff / The Detroit News

Reaping the sweet smell of success can be a dirty business.

Just ask Tigers hitting coach Lloyd McLendon -- if you can get close enough. According to USA Today, the superstitious McLendon says he hasn't changed his underwear during the team's 12-game win streak. That's almost two weeks.

"Guys are getting a little uncomfortable standing next to me now," McLendon told USA Today. "They believe they can't be beat. So if this thing keeps going, it can ugly."

Offended parties shouldn't bother complaining to Tigers manager Jim Leyland. As the Tigers' winning ways have continued, Leyland has begun wearing the same socks and underwear every day, according to mlive.com.

Chevy has standing offer for Tiger Stadium site upkeep

City says no, prefers development to diamond for kids

September 16, 2011

By Louis Aguilar / The Detroit News

Chevrolet says its offer to fix up the baseball diamond at the old Tiger Stadium site still stands, despite being rejected by the city of Detroit, a company spokesman said Wednesday.

Last month, the Detroit Economic Growth Corp. rejected an unsolicited offer by the General Motors Co. division to take care of the diamond free of charge to let youths play baseball there.

The diamond is all that is left of the Corktown site, which was demolished more than two years ago after the Tigers left following the 1999 season. The Tigers have played at Comerica Park in downtown since 2000. Chevrolet officials were surprised at the city's refusal but kept the offer open when the news of the rejection leaked Wednesday.

"This is our hometown. We know a lot of employees here would be happy to volunteer to work on the field," said Mike Albano, a Chevrolet spokesman. "We will respect the city's decision."

But Albano reiterated, "If the decision (by Detroit officials) were to change, the invitation still stands."

Officials from the Detroit Economic Growth Corp. did not return calls Wednesday.

The city continues to strike out in the public relations game because of its handling of the former Tiger Stadium site, a marketing expert said.

"This is a fastball right down the plate, and Detroit looks like it's swinging at it with a blindfold," said Michael Bernacchi, a marketing professor at University of Detroit Mercy.

"There is no way the city of Detroit wins this battle — in terms of public perception. Their long-term vision of the site has always sounded very reasonable and solid — that they need to find a feasible development. But this sounds like such a reasonable short-term solution by a venerable brand, and they missed it. It's going to dig, gnaw at that perception out there that the city didn't do all it could."

Chevrolet was willing to pay and provide employee volunteers and work with the nonprofit Old Tiger Stadium Conservancy to preserve the diamond for youth baseball. Chevrolet was in informal talks with the conservancy group to determine ways they could work together over the long term, both sides said.

But the city is looking to find a developer who will find a new use for the site, which has access to local freeways, and turned down the offer.

The decision opened an old wound for Tiger Stadium fans, many of whom tried and failed to preserve the stadium.

"It is disappointing," said Thomas Linn, president of the conservancy.

Tiger Stadium fans like urban planner Francis Grunow were quick to lash out at the city's decision on various social media sites.

"Come on Mr. Mayor ...," Grunow wrote in a post on Facebook within an hour of the story breaking Wednesday. "Chevy's offer still stands. Do it for the kids."

Friday's soup - you mean they didn't win?

September 16, 2011

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

1. Got so accustomed to comebacks during the Tigers' 12-game winning streak that when the A's had runners at second and third with no outs in the second but stranded them there, only to have Delmon Young respond in the third with a home run, I thought the Tigers were going to win again Thursday night.

2. Know how some good-but-far-from-great players do well every time you see them play? Everybody can name a player like that.

For me, at least among current players, it's David DeJesus (three-run home run). It used to be Jermaine Dye. Who's that player for you?

3. Didn't the Tigers leave the Rays out by the curb last month on their visit to St. Pete? Apparently not.

4.. Yes, I wrote it and reported it like everyone else, but now I have to ask you: Were Jim Leyland's comments about not changing his underwear during the Tigers' winning streak more than you really needed to know?.

5. Heard an ESPN'er call Alex Avila "Mike Avila" on Wednesday night " no doubt confusing him with Mike Aviles of the Red Sox.

Imagine that, someone at ESPN thinking primarily of the Red Sox.

Tigers on verge of clinching division title even as winning streak ends at 12

September 16, 2011

By Chris Iott / Booth Newspapers

OAKLAND — The winning streak is over. But the Detroit Tigers now stand just one game away from clinching a spot in the postseason.

Max Scherzer allowed three home runs Thursday night and the Tigers fell short in their first attempt to win their first division title since 1987 with a 6-1 loss to the Oakland A's.

The Tigers also saw their winning streak of 12 games — the longest for the team since the 1934 season — come to an end.

“It was a nice streak because we won 12 in a row at a critical time,” Tigers manager Jim Leyland said. “I think that’s pretty impressive. But that’s over with. We’re trying to get to the finish line.”

The Tigers saw their magic number fall to one when the Cleveland Indians lost 7-4 to the Texas Rangers earlier Thursday night. That meant the Tigers could have clinched the AL Central Division title with a victory against the A's, but they came up short.

“We’ve just got to go out and win a ballgame,” Leyland said. “It’s down to one. But we did catch a break. We went from two to one even though we didn’t win the game.”

Detroit has two chances to wrap up the division tonight. Either a Cleveland loss to Minnesota or a Tigers win at Oakland will give Detroit its first Central Division title. The Indians play at 8 p.m. and the Tigers at 10 p.m., so there is a chance Detroit could clinch the division while on the field at the Oakland Coliseum.

The only run the Tigers managed Thursday came on a Delmon Young solo home run off A's starter Brandon McCarthy.

“We didn’t do enough, and you credit their pitcher,” Leyland said. “He pitched a heck of a ballgame.”

The A's took an early 4-0 lead on a three-run home run by David DeJesus in the first inning and a solo home run by Coco Crisp to lead off the second.

The A's had a chance to blow the game open in the second. After Crisp's home run, Oakland put runners at second and third with nobody out, but Scherzer retired the next three batters on a pop-up, a strikeout and a ground-out to get out of the jam.

The Tigers got a run back in the top of the third on the home run by Young. The A's increased their lead with a solo home run by Cliff Pennington to lead off the fifth. That made it 5-1.

Scherzer (14-9) seemed to alternate between unhittable and absolutely hittable throughout his outing. He allowed three home runs and hit two of the batters who hit home runs — DeJesus and Suzuki — but also struck out eight in just five innings. He struck out the side in order in the third inning.

“Max was in and out,” Leyland said. “At times he looked extremely sharp and at other times not. Once again, for me, he got his pitch count up too quick. We’ve got to get to where he can get some quicker outs.”

Scherzer pitched well in his past two starts, allowing two earned runs in 14 innings in those starts. At times this season, when Scherzer has struggled, it has been because he has lacked command of his fastball. But he said that was not the case this time around.

“I had pretty good fastball command,” he said. “I was able to get ahead in the count pretty well, but I made a few mistakes. I left my changeup in the middle of the zone a little too much for their left-handed hitters, and they were able to hit a couple home runs.”

The Tigers struggled to string hits together against McCarthy (9-8). He allowed one run on five hits and two walks in seven innings and struck out eight.

Austin Jackson went 0-for-4 with three strikeouts against the A's right-hander.

“We didn’t do much with McCarthy,” Leyland said. “He pitched really well. He’s learned the art of pitching. He’s good. He throws some stuff up out of the strike zone with late life. He uses both sides of the plate. He pitched very, very well.”

The Chicago White Sox were officially eliminated from playoff contention with their loss to Kansas City earlier Thursday night.

That means it’s one down and one to go for the Tigers.

“We’ve got to get one more now,” Leyland said. “Hopefully, we’ll go out and get it tomorrow.”

Ryan Raburn, Alex Avila make Detroit Tigers history

September 16, 2011

By Chris Iott / Booth Newspapers

The Tigers never had two pinch-hit home runs in the same inning prior to their game Wednesday, according to baseball historian David Vincent.

Ryan Raburn and Alex Avila hit pinch-hit homers Wednesday afternoon in the ninth inning of a 6-5 victory in 10 innings over the Chicago White Sox.

It is just the second time in franchise history the Tigers have had two pinch-hit home runs in the same game.

Wayne Comer and Gates Brown had pinch-hit home runs Aug. 11, 1968 in the first game of a doubleheader against the Boston Red Sox.

The Tigers have five pinch-hit home runs this season, the most they have had in a season since they had five in 1991.

The last time the Tigers had more pinch-hit home runs in a season was 1986, when they had six.

Streak is over

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the Tigers snapped a streak of 518 consecutive losses on the road when trailing by three or more runs in the ninth inning or later in their win Wednesday over the White Sox.

That streak dated back to August 1993.

The Tigers trailed 5-2 before Raburn and Avila hit home runs in the ninth to force extra innings.

Tigers manager Jim Leyland fires back when questioned about Central Division

September 16, 2011

By Chris Iott / Booth Newspapers

OAKLAND – The manager's office at Oakland Coliseum is right next to the clubhouse.

So when Detroit Tigers manager Jim Leyland went on a loud six-minute rant Thursday afternoon about not taking anything away from his team because it plays in a “weak” division, he might have been delivering a message not only to media members and fans but also to his own players.

The lengthy exchange began when a national baseball writer suggested to Leyland that his team's accomplishments might be diminished in some people's eyes because they play in the Central Division, which currently is home to just one team with a winning record.

“You're looking for something to take something away from them,” Leyland said. “I don't want to talk about that. That's (expletive). That's total (expletive). Let me remind you of something. It was three months ago, two months ago, that the (expletive) Cleveland Indians were the talk of baseball. Everybody was saying they were pretty (expletive) good. Now, all of a sudden, because we beat them they're (expletive)? That's not fair. That's unfair.”

Leyland pressed the writer about who he had picked to win the Central Division. The writer said he thought, in the preseason, that Chicago would win.

“You picked the White Sox to win,” Leyland said. “All of a sudden, because we beat them, are they (expletive) now? That answers your question. That answers your (expletive) question. That answers your question. If you think the Central is (expletive), write that it's (expletive). ...

“I'm not falling for that (expletive). I'm not falling for that (expletive).”

Leyland said his players have done “a hell of a job” to this point and that he wasn't going to get involved in negative talk.

“I'm not going to answer silly questions, and that's a silly question, for me,” Leyland said. “The Central is what it is. That's the division we play in. We're the Detroit Tigers. Right now, we have the best record in the Central and we've earned where we're at. That's how I look at it.

“There's too much good going on. That stuff's negative. I haven't fallen for it all year, when they had our (butts) fired, when they had us all out of here, when we were a (expletive) team and everybody was ripping us. I wasn't falling for it then and I'm not falling for it now.”

Tigers manager Jim Leyland: 'I will wear these underwear until we lose'

September 16, 2011

By Chris Iott / Booth Newspapers

OAKLAND -- Detroit Tigers manager Jim Leyland said he believes everyone is a bit superstitious, even if they refuse to admit it.

But Leyland is more than willing to admit it.

He smoked a cigar at some point during the team's current winning streak and decided to smoke one every day until they lost. He had one in the ashtray in the visiting manager's office at the Oakland Coliseum.

He also started wearing the same baseball socks every day at some point during the streak, along with another item of clothing.

"I will wear these underwear until we lose," Leyland said. "I can tell you that right now. And they will not be washed. And I don't give a (expletive) who knows it."

Leyland said his baseball socks have holes in them from being worn repeatedly. But he issued a warning to Tigers clubhouse manager Jim Schmakel.

"I told Schmakel if somebody threw them out, that would be the end," Leyland said.

Tigers' Al Alburquerque unlikely to pitch in four-game series against A's

September 16, 2011

By Chris Iott / Booth Newspapers

OAKLAND -- Detroit Tigers manager Jim Leyland does not know exactly what is ailing relief pitcher Al Alburquerque. But he knows that he is not going to use his rookie reliever for a few days.

Alburquerque has pitched in just three games since returning from the disabled list after he suffered a concussion last month when he was hit in the head by a line drive during batting practice in Baltimore.

But in each of his past two outings, Leyland and head athletic trainer Kevin Rand have visited him on the mound to check on something that is bothering Alburquerque in the area of his right hip.

"It is a concern of mine," Leyland said. "It doesn't seem to be as concerning to other people, but it's a concern of mine."

Leyland said it is unlikely that he will use Alburquerque this weekend in the four-game series against Oakland.

"He's being treated," Leyland said. "I'm going to shut him down for a few days and probably try to have him ready for Kansas City."

Tigers-A's game Saturday afternoon will be televised on Fox

September 16, 2011

By Chris Iott / Booth Newspapers

OAKLAND -- The Detroit Tigers-Oakland A's game Saturday afternoon will be televised after all. Fox Sports has added the game to its Game of the Week schedule and will broadcast it on Fox stations throughout Michigan and in Toledo, Ohio, the Tigers announced today.

Fox Sports Detroit announcers Mario Impemba and Rod Allen will work the game, which will be carried on the following stations: WJBK (Detroit); WBKB (Alpena); WSMH (Flint/Saginaw); WXMI (Grand Rapids); WSYM (Lansing/Jackson); WLUC (Marquette); WFQX (Traverse City); and WUPW (Toledo).

The game is scheduled to start at 4:07 p.m. Fox holds exclusive broadcast rights during that time slot, so the game has been scheduled all season to be untelevised.

But once it became apparent that the Tigers might have a shot at clinching their first division title since 1987 with a win in that game, efforts were made to get it on television. They paid off.

The way things turned out, the Tigers could very likely clinch before Saturday. Any combination of Tigers wins and Cleveland Indians losses that add up to two would eliminate the Indians. Any single Tigers victory or Chicago White Sox loss would eliminate the White Sox.

Therefore, the Tigers could clinch as early as tonight if the Indians lose their game and the Tigers beat Oakland in the series opener.

Tigers' streak snapped, clinch on hold

September 16, 2011

By Eric Gilmore / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- The Tigers will have to keep the champagne on ice for at least one more day.

The A's made sure of that Thursday night, beating the Tigers, 6-1, to snap their 12-game winning streak and keep them from clinching the American League Central crown.

Detroit's magic number fell to one when Cleveland suffered a 7-4 loss to Texas in a game that ended when the Tigers and Oakland were still in the third inning. By then, the White Sox had been eliminated with a 7-2 loss to Kansas City.

Detroit can win the AL Central on Friday with either a win over the A's or an Indians loss at Minnesota.

"We just have to go out and win a ballgame," manager Jim Leyland said. "That's just the way it is. It's down to one, but we did catch a break. We went from two to one even though we didn't win the game. Somehow we've got to get the one now. That's really where it stands. That's what we want."

Tigers right-hander Max Scherzer faced the A's for the first time this season Thursday, and the second time in his career. In his first start against the A's last year at Comerica Park, he struck out a career-high 14 in just 5 2/3 innings, allowing two hits and no runs while earning the victory.

This time, the A's got even.

Scherzer gave up seven hits -- three of them home runs -- and five runs in five innings. He struck out eight, walked one and hit two batters, taking the loss to fall to 14-9.

A's right-hander Brandon McCarthy, meanwhile, allowed just one run and five hits over seven innings, striking out eight and walking two.

"Obviously, you're aware of the situation," Scherzer said. "We want to clinch for the playoffs. That's the No. 1 goal. At the same time, I'm going out there trying to execute pitches. I'm out there trying to pitch my game.

There's no external surroundings there that's affecting my game at all. It just came down tonight [that] when I needed to execute a pitch, I didn't and made a mistake, and that's what cost me."

The A's jumped to a 3-0 lead with two outs in the first inning when David DeJesus launched a three-run homer off Scherzer into the right-field seats. DeJesus, a former Kansas City Royal, worked a 2-2 count then hammered a changeup that Scherzer left over the plate for his ninth home run of the season.

"Right before I hit the homer, I just missed two fastballs straight back," DeJesus said. "I felt good on my swings, and he threw a changeup, and my thought process was going the other way, and I was able to stay through the ball and get it over the wall. It was a big inning, kind of get it going in the right direction early on. You want to put them in a hole early on."

Leading off the second, A's catcher Kurt Suzuki crushed a fastball to left off Scherzer for his 14th long ball, making it 4-0. Eric Sogard and Coco Crisp followed with back-to-back singles, but Scherzer retired the next three batters.

"Max just didn't keep the ball in the ball park, and we didn't do much," Leyland said. "McCarthy pitched really well. I saw him as a young kid with the White Sox. He's learned the art of pitching. He pitched. He threw some balls out of the strike zone with late life. He used both sides of the plate. He pitched very, very well. And Max just didn't keep the ball in the ballpark."

Detroit cut the lead to 4-1 with one out in the third when Delmon Young hit a home run to deep left off McCarthy. It was Young's ninth blast of the year, and fifth since being traded to the Tigers from Minnesota.

When Young's blast cleared the wall, Scherzer said he thought the Tigers might keep their streak alive.

"Yeah, I thought if I could go out there and throw up some zeroes and work some quick innings and kind of give our offense a chance to be in the dugout and get some rhythm and momentum going, we could scratch and claw back," Scherzer said. "I just wasn't able to do that, and their guy threw pretty well too."

Oakland struck back for a run in the fifth. Leading off, shortstop Cliff Pennington homered to right-center, the ball landing on top of the wall then bouncing over. Like DeJesus, Pennington hit a changeup.

The Tigers' 12-game streak was their longest since 1934, when they tied the franchise mark with 14 consecutive victories. Detroit was beaten for the first time since a Sept. 1 loss to the Royals.

The Tigers led the AL Central by 5 1/2 games when their streak began on Sept. 2 with an 8-1 win over the White Sox. Now they're 13 1/2 in front of the Indians and White Sox. They swept three games from Chicago, three from the Cleveland, three from the Twins and three more from the White Sox, burying their division foes. "I think the thing that impressed me about the streak is the fact that a lot of that streak was the White Sox and Indians at a critical time in the season," Leyland said. "The two teams that were right behind us, we stepped up to the plate during that period of time. That to me makes it a pretty impressive streak. That's the way I look at it."

Detroit's streak, superstitions go by wayside

September 16, 2011

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- For virtually every game of the Tigers' 12-game winning streak, manager Jim Leyland preached about taking each one as it comes and not looking too far ahead. And to a remarkable degree, his team did that. But that doesn't mean Leyland and others didn't have their superstitions.

In Leyland's case, Thursday's 6-1 loss to the A's meant the superstitions were finally over, including a much-needed break for the clothes off his back -- or some other places.

"I will wear these underwear until we lose," Leyland declared before the game. "I can tell you that right now. And they will not be washed. And I don't give a care who knows it."

It's unclear whether the skipper had been wearing the underwear throughout the winning streak, or if he started the trend at some point when the wins started racking up. It was clear after the game, though, that it was over.

"This is kind of one of those good news/bad news [games]," Leyland said. "The bad news is we lost. The good news is I can change my underwear."

Asked how that will feel, Leyland smiled.

"It'll be wonderful," he joked. "It'll be a celebration."

Not all players were superstitious about the streak. Utility man Don Kelly said he has more routines than he does superstitions, and he doesn't freak out if he forgets to do something on a given day.

More than worrying about a jinx, Kelly said, guys were trying to enjoy the winning streak and the race in a way they didn't in 2009, when they were terrified about blowing their September lead.

"I think these guys have really grasped this moment," Kelly said. "It's not like you get a chance to do this every year. When you go through things -- and nobody wanted to go through that in '09 -- I think a lot of guys who were on the team then have learned from it."

But then, there are guys like Ramon Santiago, who has been looking a little shaggy lately for a reason. He said he hasn't cut his hair since they started winning, which is a pretty long time for him. Originally, he wasn't going to cut his hair until the Tigers clinched the division. Now, he's thinking beyond that, taking it into October. If it worked for Magglio Ordonez in 2006, it could work for him.

Albuquerque to miss A's series as precaution

OAKLAND -- A day after Tigers reliever Al Albuquerque had a mid-inning visit from head athletic trainer Kevin Rand to attend to tightness in his right quadriceps, manager Jim Leyland said he's shelving the hard-throwing reliever for a few days.

With multiple mound visits this week, Leyland doesn't want to take the chance that Albuquerque aggravates the quad -- or worse, suffers another injury trying to compensate for it.

Leyland said Albuquerque won't pitch in this series against the A's. He hopes to have him ready for next week's two-game set at Kansas City.

"It is a concern of mine," Leyland said. "It isn't as big of a concern for some other people, but it's a concern of mine."

Considering it's Leyland's job to put together a middle relief corps to carry leads to his late-inning duo of Joaquin Benoit and Jose Valverde, it's an understandable concern. Albuquerque has been a big part of that.

Leyland ardent in support of AL Central

OAKLAND -- Just because Tigers manager Jim Leyland doesn't want to talk about the looming American League Central title, that doesn't mean he won't talk about the race. As was discovered Thursday, the skipper is more than willing to defend the division against its critics.

The combination of the Tigers' September winning streak -- which ended with Thursday's 6-1 loss to the A's -- and a late-season schedule heavy on divisional matchups has left much of the Central in ruins south of Detroit. What just a few weeks ago was a race that featured three teams within a handful of games of each other now has the Tigers as the only team above .500.

Some look at it as the downturn of the AL Central. Leyland takes the opposite view.

"The thing that impressed me about the streak," he said, "is the fact that a lot of streak was the White Sox and Indians at a critical time in the season. The two teams that were right behind us, we stepped up to the plate in that period of time. That, to me, makes it a pretty impressive streak.

"That's the way I look at it. We're all kind of bunched up there together, and to play the Indians [three] times and the White Sox six times during this stretch, that's pretty impressive, I think. To beat those two teams involved, that's pretty good."

Detroit owns a 46-21 record against the rest of the division; none of the other teams has a winning record in the Central. The Tigers have played .500 ball outside of the division, but they haven't lost a series against a non-division opponent since early July, including victories over the Rangers and Rays, and a split with the Angels. When a reporter, playing devil's advocate, asked Leyland if that took anything away from the streak the Tigers were on, Leyland strongly disagreed.

"Let me remind you of something: It was two months ago, three months ago that the Cleveland Indians were the talk of baseball," Leyland said. "Everybody was saying they were pretty good. Now all of a sudden, because we beat them, they're terrible? That's not fair. That's unfair."

Leyland pointed to the Tigers' winning records against the Rangers (6-3), Yankees (4-3) and Rays (6-1) this season as evidence in his favor.

"When they had to step it up, they stepped it up," Leyland said. "And nobody can take that away from us. Nobody can put a damper on what those guys have done, because they deserve it. I can't help what happened with the White Sox and Cleveland. I can't help that. ...

"I'll guarantee you one thing: It's not everybody's lining up to play the Tigers, either."

Tigers hand out Minor League awards

OAKLAND -- Two of the Tigers' top picks from last year's Draft were rewarded for making an immediate impression in their first pro seasons.

Class A West Michigan third baseman Nick Castellanos and Double-A Erie left-hander Drew Smyly were named the Tigers Minor League Player and Pitcher of the Year, respectively.

For Castellanos, it was a validation of the high regard he inherited as soon as he signed as Detroit's top selection last summer. He became the organization's top position prospect upon arrival, and his numbers didn't disappoint. After a slow start with the Whitecaps, Castellanos heated up in May and never cooled. The 19-year-old batted .312 with 36 doubles, seven home runs and 76 RBIs.

Smyly's award was a little different scenario. Though he was Detroit's second-round selection in that same Draft out of the University of Arkansas, he was further down the line among pitching prospects in an organization that includes Jacob Turner and Andy Oliver, among others. Statistically, Smyly topped them all.

The 22-year-old proved stingy in the Florida State League, going 7-3 with a 2.58 ERA and 77 strikeouts over 80 1/3 innings, before taking Turner's spot at Erie at the end of July.

Smyly went just 4-3 with the SeaWolves, but his 1.18 ERA in seven starts and a relief appearance made his case. Add up the totals at two different levels, and he allowed just two home runs over 126 innings with 130 strikeouts.

Quick hits

- According to SABR home run expert David Vincent, the pinch-hit home runs from Ryan Raburn and Alex Avila on Wednesday marked the first time the Tigers connected for two pinch-hit homers in the same inning. The only other time Detroit cracked two pinch-hit homers in the same game was on Aug. 11, 1968, when Wayne Comer and Gates Brown did it in the first game of a doubleheader.

- Wednesday's win also marked the first time since August 1993 that the Tigers won a road game after trailing by three or more runs in the ninth inning or later. They had lost 518 straight games in such situations.

- Three home runs Max Scherzer allowed in Thursday's loss to the A's moved his total to 29 on the season, second highest among American League starters. Former Tiger and current Ranger Colby Lewis has 33. Cincinnati's Bronson Arroyo leads the Majors with 40.

- Magglio Ordonez's first-inning single stretched his hitting streak to 13 games. The veteran is batting 17-for-46 (.370) over that stretch.

- Ramon Santiago went 0-for-3 on Thursday to end a nine-game hitting streak, during which he batted .409 (11-for-27).

Magic number at one for Tigers in Oakland

September 16, 2011

By Jesse Sanchez / MLB.com

The Tigers have been playing so well lately that they have found a way to walk away feeling victorious even after a defeat.

On Thursday, the A's topped the Tigers, 6-1, to snap Detroit's 12-game winning streak. However, thanks to the Rangers' 7-4 victory over the Indians, Detroit clinched at least a share of the American League Central title and reduced its magic number to one.

Detroit can win the division on Friday with either a win over the A's or an Indians loss at Minnesota.

That's how good the Tigers have been lately. That's also where Detroit starter Doug Fister steps in. Not only has Fister gone 5-1 since joining Detroit from Seattle in a July 30 trade, he has allowed just three earned runs on 22 hits over 36 2/3 innings in his past five starts.

Fister will look to continue his winning ways Friday. The A's will counter with Trevor Cahill.

"[Fister] was a guy that we targeted that we really thought would help our club," Tigers manager Jim Leyland said. "And so far, knock on wood, we've been right."

Call Leyland a master of the understatement. Fister has 41 strikeouts in 51 1/3 innings with the Tigers, which is noteworthy when considering he struck out just 89 hitters in 146 innings this season while with the Mariners.

"It's a world of emotions this year. Gone through a lot of ups and downs," Fister said. "Really just trying to stay as consistent as possible and enjoy it. Take it one thing at a time and really just focus in on the task at hand today.

"That's been my focus is, 'Hey, let's do the job we need to do right now and worry about whatever comes up later.'"

As for Cahill, the right-hander has won two straight, but he has just one quality start in his last six tries.

Cahill was spectacular in his only other start against Detroit this season, allowing just one run on four hits with nine strikeouts and no walks in eight innings.

Tigers: V-Mart swinging hot stick in September

Victor Martinez went 0-for-4 on Thursday, but the veteran backstop is nonetheless in the midst of a September to remember. V-Mart is hitting .321 with four doubles, three homers and 17 RBIs in 13 games this month.

- Jose Valverde's 44 consecutive saves to start the season is the longest such streak in club history.
- The Tigers have won 22 of their last 27 games dating back to Aug. 19.

A's: Defensive lapses proving costly

The A's have committed nine errors in their last eight games, and 119 errors for the season. The errors are the most by an A's team since 2001, when the club had 125 miscues.

- Oakland is 29-29 since the All-Star break after going 39-53 before the break.

Worth noting

- The Tigers have won 24 of their last 34 games on the road, dating back to July 6.
- The A's are 18-24 in one-run games this season. They have not finished with a losing record in one-run games in the last 12 years.
- Oakland leads the all-time series against Detroit, 344-310. The A's lead the season series, 4-3.
- Detroit's 12-game winning streak was its longest since 1934, when the club matched a team record with 14 consecutive victories.

Tigers' 12-game winning streak snapped by A's

September 16, 2011

By Dana Wakiji / FOXSportsDetroit.com

The Tigers probably forgot how to act Thursday night, being accustomed to the postgame congratulatory handshake line.

Everything seemed to be falling into place for the Tigers to win their division for the first time since 1987 -- both the Cleveland Indians and Chicago White Sox lost, and the Tigers were facing a 67-82 Oakland A's team. The A's do have an above-.500 home record, though, which they improved upon Thursday night with a 6-1 victory, snapping the Tigers' 12-game winning streak.

The Tigers' magic number decreased to one, but the celebration will have to wait another day, although there might be a small celebration of another sort.

Before the game, Leyland admitted to reporters that he's worn the same underwear during the winning streak. "This is kind of one of those good news, bad news. The bad news is we lost, the good news is I can change my underwear after 12 days," Leyland told FOX Sports Detroit's Ryan Field on the post-game show. "It'll be wonderful. It'll be a celebration."

Max Scherzer, who had won his previous two starts, wasn't celebrating much after allowing five runs on seven hits while walking one and striking out eight.

Scherzer (14-9) also gave up three home runs, which he did Aug. 29 in a 9-5 loss to the Kansas City Royals. The only other time Scherzer has allowed more home runs was his first start of the season, April 3 in New York, when he gave up four.

"Max just didn't keep the ball in the ballpark and we didn't do much," Leyland said. "He's in and out with his control a little bit. He hasn't been able to finish them off with his slider to some of the righties.

"(David) DeJesus hit a low changeup out of the park, just a little inconsistent with his command and quality strikes. I think that's been a little bit of the problem. He'll get it ironed out."

One of the home runs was hit by Oakland's Cliff Pennington, who was happy to put a crimp in the Tigers' celebration plans.

"We're baseball fans so we're definitely aware of it," Pennington said. "Yeah, you definitely take some pride in not letting them celebrate on your home field.

"We've still got three more games with them so hopefully we can make them celebrate after a loss."

For the season, Scherzer has allowed 29 home runs, second most in the American League. Former Tiger Colby Lewis has given up 33.

The Tigers' offense, which had averaged 7.9 runs a game during the streak, only managed one, on Delmon Young's solo home run off A's starter Brandon McCarthy in the third inning.

"McCarthy pitched really well," Leyland said. "I saw him when he was a young kid with the White Sox. He's learned the art of pitching.

"He pitched and throws some balls out of the strike zone with late life, used both sides of the plate. He pitched very, very well."

The Tigers on Friday turn to Doug Fister, who has had five straight starts of seven-plus innings with one earned run or less.

"He pitches a little like (McCarthy), to be honest with you," Leyland said. "We just gotta go out and win a ballgame and that's just the way it is.

"It's down to one, so we did catch a break. It went from two to one even though we didn't win the game, so somehow we've got to get the one now."

The Tigers might not even have to finish the game Friday night to clinch, depending on whether the Minnesota Twins can defeat the Indians at Target Field. Kevin Slowey pitches for the Twins, Ubaldo Jimenez for the Indians.

First Pitch: Tigers streak ends at 12, but magic number down to 1

September 16, 2011

By Jorge L. Ortiz / USA Today.com

Jim Leyland and Lloyd McClendon can finally put on a fresh pair of underwear.

The Detroit Tigers manager and their hitting coach had held steady to superstition during the team's 12-game winning streak, not only refusing to change underwear but, in Leyland's case, opting not to wash the pair he kept using, lest he somehow jinx the Tigers' good fortunes.

Detroit's run finally ended with Thursday night's 6-1 loss to the Oakland Athletics, falling two victories short of equaling the franchise record. The 1934 club of Hall of Famers Hank Greenberg and Charlie Gehringer, which reached the World Series, was the last Tigers team to win 14 in a row.

The streak allowed Detroit to stretch its lead in the AL Central from 5½ to its current 13½ games, largest in the majors, leaving the Chicago White Sox and Cleveland Indians in the dust. Both lost Thursday, so even in defeat the Tigers saw their magic number shrink to one.

Detroit is seeking its first division crown since 1987, when it was a member of the AL East.

"I've never been through a streak like this," Leyland said a few hours before it ended. "Up to this point with winning streaks, I don't make too big a deal about it. I'm not interested in the '34 Tigers. I don't pay attention to that. I'm proud of it because you end up with 12 games with Cleveland and Chicago and you win all of them, and three with Minnesota and you sweep them, all division rivals, that's pretty good."

One of the driving forces behind the Tigers' surge has been designated hitter Victor Martinez, who is hitting .321 with 17 RBI in 14 September games.

As a productive switch-hitter behind Miguel Cabrera, Martinez gives opponents pause before walking the MVP candidate to face him. Martinez is hitting .386 with runners in scoring position, second-best in the league, behind Cabrera.

"I think he's had the biggest impact of anybody on our team," Cabrera said of his fellow Venezuelan, who joined the Tigers as a free agent in the offseason and has 94 RBI. "He protects me in the lineup and forces teams to choose whether to deal with me or him."

For his part, Leyland doesn't want to deal with any assumptions that the Tigers are assured a postseason spot until it's a mathematical reality.

For the last week or so he has been smoking some Montecristo cigars he received as a gift, but he's so mindful of baseball etiquette that he makes a point of saying these are not victory cigars, a la Red Auerbach.

After all, the magic number is not down to zero yet, so there's no sense in throwing out that lucky pair of drawers.

"We still have to get one more somehow," Leyland said. "It was a nice streak but that's over and we have to finish it."

Verlander is MVP, or not, depending on who you ask

September 16, 2011

By Bob Nightengale / USAToday.com

Detroit Tigers pitcher Justin Verlander badly wants to win the American League MVP award, but not everyone on his team, let alone the rest of the league, is convinced he should be a serious candidate.

"It's an awkward situation," Tigers manager Jim Leyland says. "I personally do not believe a pitcher should be the MVP. I think it should go to guys who have to grind it out every day, who play 155 games. But the way the voting is constructed, Justin Verlander should be a top candidate. There's no question about it."

Verlander, 23-5 with a 2.36 ERA and league-leading 238 strikeouts in 236 innings, has turned the AL Cy Young Award into a no-brainer. Yet, he also wants to become the fourth Tigers pitcher to win the MVP.

"I want to win it, and I hope to continue to make a case for it," Verlander says. "But there's no point in me lobbying for myself."

Pitchers have become as forgotten as bullpen cars in MVP voting since the dawn of the offense-dominated steroid era. Oakland Athletics closer Dennis Eckersley was the last of 20 pitchers to win an MVP, in 1992; no starter has won since the Boston Red Sox's Roger Clemens in 1986, the longest pitcher drought since the first MVPs were awarded in 1911. No pitcher has finished in the top three since Pedro Martinez was second in 1999.

"I just don't think a pitcher should win unless he's breaking records or putting up Bob Gibson numbers," says TBS analyst John Smoltz, the 1996 NL Cy Young winner, who was 11th in MVP balloting. "I don't think voters will go with a pitcher who goes once every five days."

Smoltz's former teammate Greg Maddux won four consecutive Cy Young Awards and 355 games and never finished higher than third in MVP voting. He would love to see Verlander win but doesn't believe it will happen. Not this year, and maybe not ever.

"I could always see a closer getting it," Maddux says, "but not a starter. To be honest, I never thought a closer should get the Cy Young. I always thought that starting pitchers should have the Cy Young, the everyday guys have the MVP, and the closer get the Fireman (award).

"I'm not going to complain if Verlander gets the MVP. I think it would be awesome. I'd have a bigger problem with a closer getting the Cy Young than a closer getting the MVP."

Verlander may lead the AL in virtually every pitching category, but he has appeared in only 32 games. Tigers closer Jose Valverde, 44-for-44 in save opportunities, has pitched in 68 games. Tigers first baseman Miguel Cabrera, who is hitting .333 with a .436 on-base percentage, 26 homers, 97 RBI and 102 runs, has missed one game all season.

"I'd like to win it one day," Cabrera says, "but the reason we're in first place is because of (Verlander). What he's done is unbelievable. You never know when you might see something like this again."

Verlander has been instrumental in the Tigers' runaway season. He is 21-2 since May 7, including a franchise-tying record 11 consecutive wins and is 15-3 with a 1.53 ERA in starts following a Tigers' loss.

"When I played, I never thought a pitcher should win the MVP," said Tigers hitting coach Lloyd McClendon, who played five different positions in his career, "but after watching his season, I'm on the fence. And that fence is starting to shake a little bit."

There are plenty of arguments that a starting pitcher is more valuable than just this starts. Verlander, the Tigers say, affects at least one game before and after his starts because he gives the bullpen a chance to rest when he pitches. He has a league-leading 236 innings, and has lasted at least six innings in all 32 starts.

"Verlander is having the greatest season of any pitcher I've ever seen," says Chicago White Sox starter Jake Peavy, who won the 2007 NL Cy Young Award. "But I've got mixed feelings about a guy who only plays 34 games than a guy who plays every day."

"I know he's as valuable to the Detroit Tigers as anyone in baseball. And you ask yourself, could the Detroit Tigers win a World Series without him? He deserves to be in consideration, but win it, I don't know."

This year's AL MVP debate may be the hottest since 1999, says Jack O'Connell, secretary-treasurer of the Baseball Writers Association of America whose members cast the votes.

It was 12 years ago that Martinez went 23-4 with a 2.07 ERA and 313 strikeouts for the Boston Red Sox. Yet, he finished second to Texas catcher Pudge Rodriguez, who hit .332 with 35 homers and 113 RBI. Two writers

left Martinez off their MVP balloting, although both would have had to vote Martinez fourth or better for him to win the award.

"I know it's a great debate, and I love it, because it shows that this is the best award in sports," O'Connell says. "But to me, it's very simple. Just vote for the guy who you think is the most valuable player."

What might help Verlander the most, White Sox first baseman Paul Konerko says, is that there is no MVP favorite. Jose Bautista of Toronto has the best statistics, but his team won't be in the postseason. There's debate in Boston over whether Jacoby Ellsbury or Adrian Gonzalez is the MVP of the Red Sox, and the same in New York with Curtis Granderson and Robinson Cano. And there's Cabrera in Detroit.

"There are a lot of guys having a lot of nice seasons," Konerko says, "but no one is having that monster year. Nobody is hitting .390 and nobody is pushing 50 homers. So if there's no clear-and-cut guy, the (voters) just may say, "OK, I'll go with the best pitcher."

De Jesus three-run home run sparks Oakland, helps prevents Detroit from clinching division

September 16, 2011

By The Associated Press Staff / The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — David DeJesus and Kurt Suzuki both hit long home runs off Detroit starter Max Scherzer. Both Oakland players paid a painful price, too. It's been that kind of season for the Athletics this year. A few memorable plays and a collection of forgettable ones.

.At least this time they won — ending Detroit's 12-game winning streak and preventing the Tigers from clinching the AL Central, to boot.

DeJesus hit a three-run home run in the first inning, Suzuki added a solo shot in the second and Oakland beat Detroit 6-1 on Thursday night.

Scherzer later hit both players on the elbow — Suzuki by a changeup leading off the fourth and DeJesus by a fastball in the fifth.

"It was a cold night, too," said A's manager Bob Melvin, who made his major league debut as a player with the Tigers in 1985. "We do have some power, and we've been better in the second half. But this ballpark can be tough to hit home runs into."

Cliff Pennington also homered for Oakland, marking just the third game this season the A's have hit three home runs in one game. They had only 101 home runs total before beating Detroit.

DeJesus ended a 79 at-bat homerless streak with his three-run shot with two outs in the first.

"Usually you don't get home runs here at night," DeJesus said. "But the ball was carrying a little bit tonight and we were able to take advantage of it."

Brandon McCarthy pitched seven strong innings while Coco Crisp added three hits and drove in a run in his return to the A's lineup following a five-game absence due to a sore foot.

Delmon Young hit a home run for the Tigers, who still say their magic number drop to one when the Cleveland Indians fell to the Texas Rangers 7-4 earlier in the evening. The Tigers need any combination of a win or a Cleveland loss over the final 12 games to clinch the division.

McCarthy (9-8) allowed one run on five hits to improve to 3-2 with a 2.15 ERA over his last five starts. He walked two and struck out eight.

"His ball was up for a good portion of the game, which usually for him is not the case," Melvin said. "I didn't think his command was as good early on and got getting better and better. Really his best inning was the seventh."

Scherzer (14-9) lasted five innings, giving up five runs on seven hits. He walked one and struck out eight.

Tigers manager Jim Leyland will get a new change of underwear when his team goes for their first outright title since 1987 on Friday night. He said before the game that he had not changed (nor washed) his underwear during the 12-game winning streak.

The Tigers have not finished first since taking the AL East nearly a quarter-century ago. Their only playoff appearance since then came in 2006, when they won the wild card.

Crisp got Oakland going with a single leading off the first. He was forced at second by Pennington. After Hideki Matsui fouled out, Scherzer walked Josh Willingham ahead of DeJesus.

"He threw a changeup and my thought process was to go the other way but I was able to stay through the ball and get it over the wall," DeJesus said. "It was a big inning to just get us going in the right direction and we rode our pitching the rest of the way."

Suzuki led off the second with a home run and Pennington led off the fifth with a homer. Crisp doubled home a run in the eighth.

Young's home run made it 4-1 in the third.

Magglio Ordonez extended his hitting streak to 13 games with a first-inning single but Ramon Santiago went 0-for-3, ending his nine-game streak.

The A's (22-20) and Tigers (22-19) had similar records following game action on May 17. The teams have gone in notably different directions since.

Detroit was eight games behind the Cleveland Indians and four games under .500 on May 3. The Tigers have played .625 ball since and is one the verge of becoming the sixth team since 2000 to win a division title after being behind by at least eight games at some point in the season.

Notes: The last time the A's played a team on a 12-game hitting streak was at Baltimore in 1999. ... RHP Trevor Cahill (11-13, 4.32) goes for the A's on Friday night. The former All-Star is 3-6 with a 6.86 ERA in 11 starts since the All-Star Break. He beat the Tigers on April 17, allowing one run in eight innings. ... Doug Fister (8-13, 3.06) makes the start for the Tigers on Friday night. He has been outstanding since joining the Tigers, going 5-1 with a 2.28 ERA. He is 4-0 with a 0.74 ERA in his last five starts. ... A's IF Jemile Weeks (leg cramps) was out of the starting lineup for the second straight day as a precautionary measure.

Tigers' 12-game winning streak snapped by A's in 6-1 loss

September 16, 2011

By The Associated Press Staff / The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Jim Leyland sat in his office, his lucky cigar resting unlit in a nearby ashtray. He's going to throw the unused portion away — and get a clean change of underwear — now that his team's 12-game winning streak came to an end.

"I'll still smoke some of it," Leyland said. "It's a \$40 cigar and was a gift after all." David DeJesus hit a three-run homer in the first, Brandon McCarthy pitched seven strong innings and the Oakland Athletics snapped Detroit's longest winning streak in 77 years with a 6-1 victory on Thursday night, delaying the Tigers chance to clinch the AL Central Division title.

"We have 12 games left to win it," Tigers starter Max Scherzer said. "You have to like our chances. But we haven't won anything yet."

Leyland will get a new change of underwear when his team goes for their first outright title since 1987 on Friday night. He said before the game that he had not changed (nor washed) his underwear during the 12-game winning streak.

"It wasn't anything we did or didn't do," Leyland said. "We just got beat. We were ready to play but their pitcher has figured out the art of pitching. Give him all the credit."

The Tigers have not finished first since taking the AL East nearly a quarter-century ago. They only playoff appearance since then came in 2006, when they won the wild card.

Delmon Young hit a home run for the Tigers, who still saw their magic number drop to one when the Cleveland Indians fell to the Texas Rangers 7-4 earlier in the evening. The Tigers need any combination of a win or a Cleveland loss over the final 12 games to clinch the division.

"We still have to get one more somehow," Leyland said. "It was a nice streak but that's over and we have to finish it."

Kurt Suzuki and Cliff Pennington each hit a solo home run for the A's, who won for the second time in five games. Coco Crisp added three hits and drove in a run.

McCarthy (9-8) allowed one run on five hits to improve to 3-2 with a 2.15 ERA over his last five starts. He walked two and struck out eight.

"As a team you never want to see people celebrating on your home field," McCarthy said. "For us it's just getting wins and playing well. If we happen to spoil guys on the way there, that's great."

Scherzer (14-9) lasted five innings, giving up five runs on seven hits. He walked one and struck out eight.

"We've been playing good ball as of late and we're still playing the best baseball of the season right now," Scherzer said.

Leyland said the impressive fact about the streak was that it included wins over the Indians and Chicago White Sox.

"It was a critical part of the season," Leyland said. "We stepped up to the plate against the teams right behind us. To beat those two teams, that's pretty good."

DeJesus ended a 79 at-bat homerless streak with his three-run shot with two outs in the first. Coco Crisp, who returned to the lineup after missing several games with an ankle injury, singled to lead off. He was forced at second by Pennington. After Hideki Matsui fouled out, Scherzer walked Josh Willingham ahead of DeJesus. Suzuki led off the second with a home run and Pennington led off the fifth with a homer. Crisp doubled home a run in the eighth.

"It was a cold night, too," said A's manager Bob Melvin, who made his major-league debut with the Tigers in 1985. "It ended up being a good power night for us. We do have some power, and we've been better in the second half but this ballpark can be tough to hit home runs in".

Young's home run made it 4-1 in the third.

Magglio Ordonez extended his hitting streak to 13 games with a first-inning single but Ramon Santiago went 0-for-3, ending his nine-game streak.

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Last updated: Fri, September 16, 2011, 02:33 EDT

Thursday, September 15, 2011

Team	Player	Transaction
Cleveland Indians	Shin-Soo Choo	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Strained left oblique)

Wednesday, September 14, 2011

Team	Player	Transaction
Baltimore Orioles	Mark Hendrickson	Cleared Waivers and Became a Free Agent
Boston Red Sox	Nate Spears	Outrighted to Minors
Colorado Rockies	Eliezer Alfonzo	Starting to Serve Illegal Substance Suspension
New York Yankees	Steve Garrison	Outrighted to Minors
Pittsburgh Pirates	Matt Pagnozzi	Acquired Off Waivers From, Colorado
Pittsburgh Pirates	Steve Pearce	Transferred to 60-Day DL, (Broken right index finger)
Tampa Bay Rays	Alex Torres	Called Up from Minors
Tampa Bay Rays	Rob Delaney	Outrighted to Minors
Tampa Bay Rays	Dan Johnson	Purchased From Minors
Tampa Bay Rays	Jay Buente	Released
Tampa Bay Rays	Mike Ekstrom	Outrighted to Minors