



Detroit Tigers Clips

Sunday, September 18, 2011

Detroit Free Press

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Rounding the bases with the Tigers

September 18, 2011

By Matt Cammarata / Detroit Free Press

First base

Pinch homers

Just when the Tigers' winning streak appeared to be nearing an end Wednesday, they pulled off a memorable comeback. Down, 5-2, entering the ninth, manager Jim Leyland used four pinch-hitters in a row. The moves worked, as Ryan Raburn (solo) and Alex Avila (two-run) homered to even a game the Tigers won, 6-5, in the 10th.

Second base

Spirit of '34

The Tigers' win streak reached 12 games, their longest since 1934. They outscored opponents, 95-36, sweeping division opponents Chicago (twice), Cleveland and Minnesota, virtually knocking the White Sox and Indians out of playoff contention. In two weeks, the Tigers went from wondering if they could win the Central to being the first AL team to clinch a playoff spot.

Third base

C'mon, Al

Rookie reliever Al Alburquerque appears to have suffered an injured right quadriceps after pitching only three times since coming off the disabled list due to his concussion last month. Alburquerque might be available to pitch against Kansas City this week. The right-hander, when healthy, has been a key part of the Tigers' bullpen and would be useful for middle relief in the postseason.

Home

Playoff roster

The Tigers have plenty of flexibility with their lineup because of the expanded roster, but come October there will be some tough decisions for Leyland to make. An interesting choice will be whether Carlos Guillen makes the cut. Guillen started Wednesday, his first since Sept. 3, and went 3-for-5 with a home run and drove in the winning run in the 10th inning.

Scouting the Tigers' week ahead

September 18, 2011

By Matt Cammarata / Detroit Free Press

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Royals

KAUFMANN STADIUM, KANSAS CITY, MO.

Matchup: Tigers at Kansas City for two games -- 8:10 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday.

Scouting report

The Tigers' final trip of the season ends in Kansas City, where they have gone 5-2 this year. The Royals have fared much better at home (39-39) this season than on the road (28-47) and could finish out of the AL Central basement for just the second time since 2003. The Royals' lineup has five players with at least 70 RBIs (1B Eric Hosmer, OFs Melky Cabrera, Alex Gordon, Jeff Francoeur and DH Billy Butler).

Orioles

COMERICA PARK

Matchup: Tigers vs. Baltimore for four games, 7:05 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and 1:05 Sunday.

Scouting report

The Orioles visit Comerica Park for the first time since early September 2010. The Tigers are 3-3 against the Orioles this season, giving up 29 runs in those six games. The Orioles should finish last in the AL East for the fourth consecutive year, mostly due to pitching, which has the worst ERA and WHIP and the fewest quality starts in the majors. The Orioles' offense ranks near the middle of the American League in most categories and has been led by outfielder Adam Jones (.280, 23 HRs, 80 RBIs) and shortstop J.J. Hardy (.266, 27 HRs, 73 RBIs).

Tigers postseason history

September 18, 2011

By Detroit Free Press Staff / Detroit Free Press

The Tigers will play in the postseason for the 13th time. Here's a quick rundown of their previous postseasons:
2006

As the wild card, beat the New York Yankees in the American League Division Series and Oakland in the American League Championship Series before losing to St. Louis in the World Series.

1987

AL East champs lost to Minnesota in the ALCS.

1984

AL East champs beat Kansas City in the ALCS and San Diego in the World Series.

1972

AL East champs lost to Oakland in the ALCS.

1968

AL champs beat St. Louis in the World Series.

1945

AL champs beat the Chicago Cubs in the World Series.

1940

AL champs lost to Cincinnati in the World Series.

1935

AL champs beat the Chicago Cubs in the World Series.

1934

AL champs lost to St. Louis in the World Series.

1909

AL champs lost to Pittsburgh in the World Series.

1908

AL champs lost to the Chicago Cubs in the World Series.

1907

AL champs lost to the Chicago Cubs in the World Series.

Division-clinching reality better than dream for Tigers' Doug Fister

Family, friends see him pitch Friday

September 18, 2011

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Doug Fister never had a night in baseball like the one he had Friday in northern California. The right-hander grew up in Merced, about 90 miles southwest of the Bay Area, and he pitched the Tigers' division-clinching game before more than 100 friends and family members.

That he landed with the Tigers, spraying champagne and hollering into the night after pitching for moribund Seattle the first half of the year was almost too much for him to fathom. He said he'd dreamt about such a moment, and when it arrived, the moment exceeded his dreams.

He talked about his brothers in the clubhouse. About the camaraderie they share. About the welcome he received when he arrived from Seattle in early August.

"This is unlike any other clubhouse," Fister said, showing little sign of a night of celebration.

Of course, the 6-foot-8 pitcher has endeared himself to his new teammates, too. Not only did he pitch a gem (eight innings, three hits, one run) to help the team clinch its first division title in 24 years, but he has quietly put together a stretch of starts that is, well, downright Verlander-esque.

Fister doesn't possess Verlander's velocity, but he knows how to pitch. In his past five starts, Fister's ERA is 0.72. He has struck out 34 in that span of 37 2/3 innings.

Manager Jim Leyland said Fister's performance begins with his work ethic. So it wasn't surprising to see him in the clubhouse early Saturday, one of the first players to arrive. He joked with the clubhouse attendants about the job they'd done scrubbing and fumigating the place of champagne spray and cigar smoke.

He said he had a chance to run into the stands and celebrate with his family. He said the best part of the night was running onto the field to celebrate with his new family.

Friday night "was phenomenal," he said. "Those kind of experiences can bring a group together."

He spoke for a minute or two more, then he had work to do.

"Back to business," he said.

Tigers notes, quotes from loss to Athletics

September 18, 2011

By Shawn Windsor / Detroit Free Press

AT O.CO COLISEUM, OAKLAND, CALIF.

WHAT HAPPENED: The Tigers shook off a night of celebrating a division title and gave themselves a chance to win Saturday in Oakland. Rick Porcello looked shaky early but rediscovered his cutter and curveball and pitched seven solid innings to give his team a chance. The Tigers simply couldn't get the big hit.

NOT QUITE ENOUGH: Detroit strung three hits together in the ninth -- two singles and a double -- to cut the A's lead to 5-3, and it looked like the Tigers might give themselves a shot at another improbable comeback.

DON'T BLAME THE BUBBLY: No one wanted to blame the loss on the late night after clinching Friday night. Porcello certainly didn't. He said he got sleep and was ready to pitch.

OH, THAT BULLPEN: Phil Coke entered to start the eighth inning, faced two batters and didn't give up a hit. Ryan Perry followed to face right-handed-hitting Kurt Suzuki and walked him. Perry then gave up three straight singles -- one to former Tiger Scott Sizemore -- and allowed two runs.

QUOTABLE: "Those add-on runs were a killer," manager Jim Leyland said.

AL Central champs have home-field in postseason in sights

September 18, 2011

By Drew Sharp / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- As Miguel Cabrera stood at third base during the Tigers' divisional clincher Friday night, he whispered a message to third-base coach Gene Lamont: Tell Skip that I'm playing Saturday. Amid the postgame celebration, Victor Martinez ducked into Jim Leyland's office and told him he would play Saturday as well.

"I thought (determining who plays) was the manager's job," Leyland joked.

But the point wasn't lost on Leyland.

They partied into the wee hours of Saturday, toasting the franchise's first division championship in 24 years. They had earned the opportunity to let loose -- although Leyland acknowledged a little nervousness when he heard that Justin Verlander had challenged Phil Coke and Daniel Schlereth to see who could do the best headfirst slide on a champagne-slicked plastic tarp.

But when everyone returned to the Coliseum that morning, it was back to business.

One goal achieved. The next one awaits.

The objective now is securing home-field advantage, at least through the first round.

"There's plenty of motivation to keep our foot on the accelerator, like you said," Alex Avila said. "There are only a couple games separating us, the Yankees and Texas. We're excited that we've wrapped up the division early, and that'll help us set up our rotation for the playoffs. But there's still plenty to play for."

General manager Dave Dombrowski commented before Saturday's 5-3 loss to the A's that it would be nice to look up at the scoreboard no longer worrying about how Central rivals Cleveland and Chicago fared. But there remains plenty of compelling scoreboard-watching in the regular season's closing week and a half.

What are the Yankees and Rangers doing? Does Tampa Bay catch Boston, snatching the wild card from the reeling Red Sox? The Rays would get the Tigers in the first round should Detroit secure the No. 2 playoff seed.

That might prove a far more daunting challenge for the Tigers, considering the depth of the Rays' rotation.

"Even though we know we're in the playoffs," said Martinez, "we still want to stay sharp and play well. We want to keep playing at the level we have. It's good to have the division (race) over, but we still have a lot of work to do."

Five years ago, the Tigers lost their final five games after wrapping up a playoff berth. It cost them the division title and home field for the playoffs. It didn't hurt, though, as they won seven straight for the AL pennant.

But home field could be important this time.

That'll have no bearing on whom Leyland will tap as his Game 1 starter. Call it an educated guess on my part, but I think that Verlander kid probably will get the nod. But the Game 2 starter easily could hinge on home field. Max Scherzer is better at Comerica Park. He has a 3.31 ERA in his past six home starts, a 4.62 in his past six road starts.

An efficient ground-ball pitcher like Doug Fister would better serve the Tigers on the road at launching pads such as Yankee Stadium, Fenway Park or The Ballpark at Arlington.

Leyland understandably wouldn't tip his hand about his playoff rotation and roster.

Considering they won't need a fifth starter, does Brad Penny not make the cut?

Did Carlos Guillen remove any question about his playoff value with his clutch performance in the 6-5 comeback victory in Chicago last week?

Ryan Perry didn't help his case, giving up the decisive two runs in the eighth after replacing Coke with two outs and nobody on base Saturday.

"I don't want to be that cold about it right now," Leyland said following the game. "But, I mean, yeah, that's part of it."

It was an emotionally draining Saturday. Two days pretty much merged into one. The bane of the newly crowned champion is adjusting to heightened attention. Players' phones overloaded with congratulatory texts and subsequent requests for playoff tickets. Leyland momentarily stopped his pregame session with the writers Saturday morning when his cell phone rang. It was good friend Tony La Russa, calling with congratulations. Detroit now prepares for only its second taste of playoff baseball since 1987.

"It's a great story," Leyland said. "People are spending their money. It almost sounds corny. I really get emotional about it. I can't believe how all those people come out to the park. They're out of work, and we get 40,000 at the park ... for a Thursday afternoon."

The Tigers became an escape this summer, a welcomed diversion.

But there's no escaping that the expectations for this season have grown tenfold the past two weeks. The pats on the back were nice. But 48 hours later, the praise already is ancient history.

Tigers' division-clinching willpower founded on camaraderie

September 18, 2011

By Drew Sharp / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The celebration in the Tigers' clubhouse finally broke up around 1 a.m. Pacific time Saturday, but not without aromatic reminders of champagne and cigars.

But that didn't mean the party was over.

Several players would convene at a bar near the team's downtown San Francisco hotel, toasting again the new American League Central Division champions -- and they wanted their skipper with them for a private celebratory moment away from the television cameras and reporters' notepads.

Jim Leyland was reluctant. The playoff clincher is for the players. They won it. It should be their time. But since he pretty much remained in his office during the clubhouse revelry, saying no wasn't an option this time. "We celebrated with the players," he said. "It was low key."

But it spoke to how this diverse group of personalities has melded into a tightly knit brotherhood.

They never shared the doubts of others that they weren't talented or mentally tough enough to outlast Cleveland and Chicago. Even when they trailed the surging Indians by as many as seven games, there weren't concerns that they wouldn't find that higher gear -- even if that required relying on players who weren't yet on the team.

Justin Verlander used the word "resilient" when describing these Tigers.

The word resolute could apply as well.

It says something about the character of this team when key midseason acquisitions Delmon Young, Doug Fister and Wilson Betemit credited how they were immediately made comfortable in their new surroundings. That doesn't often happen, especially when new arrivals signal reduced playing time for some of the holdovers. It helps that there are no divisive cliques on this team.

"It was like I've been here all year instead of just a month," said Young. "There's a togetherness in here that makes it fun playing with these guys, and I think you see that on the field. We're all having fun."

Leyland joined his players, but stayed only briefly.

He was hungry. He forgot to eat during the clubhouse celebration. He and third-base coach Gene Lamont went across the street to a Carl's Jr., a local fast-food chain. He got a double cheeseburger, fries and a chocolate shake with whipped cream topping. Never really one for Dom Perignon and \$50 cigars, Leyland was in his element.

"For me, that was better than champagne," Leyland said.

Tigers still have things to accomplish

September 18, 2011

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — And just like that, it was back to what remains of the regular season for the Tigers.

The plastic was off their lockers Saturday.

It was also up off the floor after acting as a slip-and-slide for some of the players, including Justin Verlander, while the celebration wound down.

And while the Tigers crossed their fingers that their ace wouldn't get hurt as boys were being boys.

It's amazing how quickly a clubhouse returns to normal. Ten hours before, it was a sea of champagne and beer — not to mention a pool of players who might not remember how they behaved in the wild moments after clinching the American League Central.

For instance ...

"He says I poured champagne on his head?" said Will Rhymes, who's 11 inches shorter than the 6-foot-8 Doug Fister. "I must have stood on a chair to do that."

The Tigers sprayed 180 bottles of champagne at each other — and maybe that many cans of beer. It became a celebration, the visiting clubhouse crew said, that was the rowdiest they'd ever seen.

And they've seen about eight of them in that clubhouse.

The Tigers also smoked \$60 cigars that Jose Valverde passed out.

But even before the end of Friday night's game, the Tigers were thinking of what they still have to accomplish before the regular season ends.

There's a home-field advantage to secure in the division series — and to do that, the Tigers need to finish with a better record than the Rangers.

So that's the next step of the mission the Tigers are on.

It also helps to explain why Miguel Cabrera told third base coach Gene Lamont during Friday night's game,

"Lefty going for Oakland tomorrow, I'm playing."

And why Victor Martinez made sure manager Jim Leyland knew, even before the celebration was over, that he wanted to play on Saturday as well.

It's not a case of no rest for the weary, though, because the Tigers aren't weary. They've simply had a taste of winning now — and they'd like to do it again and again.

"They always say you want to smoke four cigars and drink champagne four times," Brad Penny said.

The next cigar would be for winning the division series.

After that, it would be for winning the championship series. But only one team celebrates after the World Series.

Whatever the Tigers achieve, Fister will be a big part of it — as he has been already.

It didn't get lost in all the excitement that Fister pitched another strong game Friday night, improving his record to 6-1 as a Tiger.

His performance just sort of blended in with every other reason of why and how the Tigers won the division.

Fister stopped well short of calling it, or even thinking of it as a magical moment, however. He's too pragmatic for that.

"Last night was definitely phenomenal," he said. "But there's a difference between hard-work fun and Disneyland fun — and last night was just a prime example of what hard work comes down to.

"Of why we play this game and why we bust our tails in the offseason as much as we do. That's special stuff."

Fister has been a Tiger for less than two months. But there's no qualification of time when it comes to being a full-fledged teammate. Fister now feels as if the Tigers have been his only team.

"The camaraderie is unbelievable," he said. "These guys opened up their arms and made me feel so welcome so quickly.

"As of last night, though, that kind of experience brings a group so tightly together there isn't much that would take us apart.

"It makes the relationships we have that much stronger. It's something very special and I'm honored to be part of it."

Fister not only identifies with the mission the Tigers feel they are on, but has become a major ingredient of it. "That's the attitude, the approach we're taking here," he said. "It's the fire in our eyes."

Fister is from Merced, Calif., "about 1 1/2 hours from here," he said. In his clinching start, he had 50-100 people from home in the stands at the Oakland Coliseum.

Little did his friends and relatives know, when Fister was pitching well but getting no support in Seattle, that he'd become an integral part of a team now headed for the postseason.

Or that he would feel such a part of a team with which he didn't begin the season.

But he does.

"I feel at home," he said about the Tigers. "It's a complete and utter brotherhood."

Tigers manager Jim Leyland quickly gets back to reality

September 18, 2011

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — The line wasn't short

Waiting to order was a person with green hair, another one wearing wild pants — not an entirely rare wee-hours cast of characters ordering burgers and fries at a fast-food joint.

"But they probably looked at me and wondered, 'Who the heck is that?'" Jim Leyland said.

What Leyland realized, after the champagne stopped flowing following the Tigers' clinching of the American League Central on Friday night, was he hadn't eaten.

So when they got back to hotel in San Francisco, Leyland and third base coach Gene Lamont went to a Carl's Jr. instead.

"Double burger with cheese, fries and a chocolate shake," is what Leyland ordered.

And while they waited for their food, they noticed Magglio Ordonez was in line as well.

So it didn't take long for some of the Tigers to return from the giddiness of a title celebration to the everyday world of waiting for fast food.

They returned to earth quickly, in other words.

"I've already told the guys," Leyland said, "you're going to be playing one of the best, talented teams shortly (meaning whoever they play in the division series).

"But the good thing about that is, so are they."

Leyland was perhaps the only Tiger who couldn't fully enjoy the celebration.

"I was not too happy about that," he said when told of Justin Verlander's head-first slide on the plastic covering the floor of the clubhouse. "I didn't go out there very much because I didn't want to see what was going on.

"They don't want a bunch of old men hanging around. But the truth is I was a nervous wreck."

Leyland didn't even go out and do the little dance he did during a 2006 celebration.

"I was only 62 then," he said.

Leyland has been able to do more observing as a rule during the Tigers' success this month, though.

"As a coach or a manager, you can smell it when something isn't right as well as when it's right," he said.

"When it's not right, you have to make sure you don't pretend that it is right. You have to address things head-on.

"But when it is right, as it's been for a while now, you can see it flowing. You just want to make sure you keep it going.

"You basically stay out of the way.

"But you always have issues. As sweet as it was last night, I'll soon be telling someone they're not on the (postseason) roster. That's just your job as a manager.

"Somebody's going to be upset. Someone's going to be mad at me. But I'm a big boy. Like I knew there were some fans who wanted me fired this year.

"I'm just glad we did our job."

And that he eventually got his burger and fries. Not to mention his shake with whipped cream on top.

A victory feast.

Around the horn

Austin Jackson might get Sunday off — due in part to the slump he's in. Jackson is 0-for-17, but also 4-for-46 with 20 strikeouts in his last 12 games.

... At 14 consecutive games, who has the longest active hitting streak in the majors? None other than Magglio Ordonez, who has 20 hits in his last 50 at-bats, including three on Saturday.

... When the scoreboard at the Oakland Coliseum showed the Indians led the Twins 8-0 in the third inning on Saturday, Tigers' general manager and president Dave Dombrowski was asked if it felt good to say, "So what?"

"Yes, it does," he replied. "It's a good feeling to say, 'So what?' I wish them both well."

... Dombrowski, by the way, did not join Leyland in line for fast food — with good reason.

"I'd had garlic fries from the concessions here," he said before Saturday's game, "and I've not eaten since then.

They kind of stick with you."

SI covers aside, GM Dave Dombrowski is Tigers' MVP

September 18, 2011

By Jerry Green / The Detroit News

There is a certain amount of prestige to Sports Illustrated — and the cover of the current regional issue displays Tigers ace Justin Verlander in all his glory.

The letters "MVP" grace the photograph. And it's neat Verlander is now receiving notoriety.

There have been several revealing personal highlights to this baseball season.

And one of them involves this same literary giant, SI, and its website which recently tossed up a marvelous headline for a baseball column:

"The best 1-2 pitching combo might not be in Philadelphia. Jered Weaver and Dan Haren are almost SINGLE-HANDEDLY pushing the Angels back toward the postseason."

This masterpiece of the English language usage ignored the high likelihood the best 1-2 pitching combo might not be in Philadelphia or Anaheim.

It is in Detroit.

Verlander and Doug Fister.

And right now, two weeks to go before the postseason, they would, for my precious nickel, be 1-2 above the Phillies' Roy Halladay and Cliff Lee or Cole Hamels.

It could be said Verlander has single-handedly pointed the Tigers toward the playoffs. This would be a tribute to the most valuable player in all of Major League Baseball in 2011. Single-handedly Verlander also would also be an exaggeration.

Art of the deal

The Tigers are advancing to the playoffs, possibly to another American League pennant, possibly also to a World Series showdown with the Phillies, primarily due to a swindler.

The swindler is Dave Dombrowski.

If any individual accomplished anything single-handedly, it was Dombrowski. In May the Tigers were a sagging team, eight games behind the Indians in the American League Central.

The Tigers' surge dates to July 30.

That was the day Dombrowski did the work of a pickpocket. He lifted Fister from the hapless Mariners.

Liberated, Fister has developed into the Tigers' No. 2 starter — not the No. 5 pitcher they so badly needed at the time.

It was then, in July, that the multitudes of yelping critics were grouching as they have done every summer the Tigers would fail again. That they'd have another second-half swoon. That manager Jim Leyland was a bum.

That Dombrowski and Leyland were lame ducks and working scared.

Then Dombrowski rooked the Mariners out of Fister. He already rooked the Royals out of Wilson Betemit and soon accepted the gift of Delmon Young from the Twins.

All three newcomers acquired in lopsided deals figured in the Tigers' rush to their first division title in 24 years. But the deal for Fister was the catalyst.

The Tigers had a jittery 1 1/2 -game lead in the American League Central on July 30. They continued with a tenuous lead through the first half of August — then boom.

Since Fister became a force on the pitching staff, the Tigers have won 32 of 44 games (through Friday). In a month they opened a 13 1/2- game separation between them and their divisional rivals, beating the Indians and White Sox up without mercy. Since then, they have gone unchallenged to clinching the AL Central title.

In that time Verlander masterfully has not lost a starting assignment and Fister has won six games. The sixth was the first-place clincher Friday night in Oakland.

And 10 days after Dombrowski's act of larceny in acquiring Fister, all the suspense — and conjecture — about his future and Leyland's future was terminated by club owner Mike Ilitch. Mike always know what he wants — to win — so he re-upped Dombrowski for four more years and Leyland through 2012.

Dombrowski actually works in a lineage of swindlers. The best of general managers usually outslick their counterparts.

The trade for Fister — and David Pauley for the bullpen — cost the Tigers four athletes. The payment was Casper Wells, Charlie Furbush and Francisco Martinez, with Chance Ruffin designated later. Three part-time major leaguers for whom there was no future in Detroit plus an expendable prospect.

For a quality starter and a dependable relief pitcher.

A few days earlier Dombrowski pried Betemit — he tripled in the winning run in the title clincher — from the Royals for two players in the Tigers' minor league system. Neither had any prospect of ever playing for Detroit. Then when the Twins offered to offload Young on waivers, Dombrowski made the claim. He cinched the trade for another farm system player with little chance of ever playing in Detroit and obscure rookie pitcher Lester Olivares.

Three swindles for Dombrowski.

History repeats itself

This sort of larceny has been vital in the Tigers' history of first-place finishes.

Bill Lajoie became a swindler for the Tigers in their first-place seasons of the 1980s. This after rebuilding the farm system with the likes of Alan Trammell, Lou Whitaker, Jack Morris, Kirk Gibson, Lance Parrish.

During spring training in 1984, Lajoie out-dealt the Phillies in a four-player trade. Dave Bergman joined the Tigers along with a roustabout relief pitcher — Willie Hernandez. The Tigers traded away John Wockenfuss and Glenn Wilson.

Hernandez became the best relief pitcher in the majors that season. The Tigers won the pennant and the World Series in a breeze. And Hernandez won the MVP as well as the Cy Young.

It was a stick-'em-up trade in favor of the Tigers.

And as Dombrowski this year upgraded the Tigers by signing Victor Martinez as a free agent, Lajoie did the same by signing Darrell Evans in 1984.

Lajoie attempted another trade swindle in 1987, when the Tigers needed a boost to finish first. To this day, 24 years later, the trade for Doyle Alexander remains a loaded controversy in Detroit. The Tigers finished first in the '87 race, clinching in the final game, over the Blue Jays.

This time, it might be said by some, Alexander single-handedly pitched the Tigers to the title. Truth is, Alex received plenty of help, certainly from Trammell and Gibson. Yet the Tigers would not have finished first without Alexander. He went 9-0 for Detroit in the final six weeks of the '87 season.

But there are those bitter souls who believe it was the Tigers who were swindled in that deal. Lajoie was required to give up the prize of their farm system, John Smoltz, to the Braves.

Smoltz became part of the best pitching staff in baseball — perhaps ever — with Greg Maddox and Tom Glavine on the Braves. They won five National League pennants.

And in Detroit there was the 24-year interlude between first-place finishes. From 1987, the first-place achievement resulting largely because of the trade for Alexander, until now.

Tigers suffer title hangover in loss to A's

September 18, 2011

By Tom Gage / The Detroit News

Oakland, Calif. — But did the Indians win?

Wait a minute, that doesn't matter anymore.

Even so, while it wasn't the morning after for the Tigers, the afternoon after wasn't anything special.

Following their division-clinching victory and champagne celebration of Friday, the trouble the Tigers caused on Saturday was too little and too late in a 5-3 loss to the Oakland Athletics.

Neither manager Jim Leyland nor starter Rick Porcello blamed the revelry of the previous night for the loss, however.

"We had guys out there (on base)," Leyland said. "We just couldn't get them in. It was still a good day because I thought Porcello pitched pretty well.

"That was the best news of the day for me."

Said Porcello, "Regardless of what happened last night, I was going to be ready. It has a different feel to it, now that we're not playing to clinch. But you still have a job to do.

"We're still playing to get a good seed going into the playoffs."

What proved to be the difference were the two runs Ryan Perry allowed in the eighth after replacing Phil Coke with two outs and the bases empty.

Not exactly the way to lock down a bullpen spot for the postseason.

"I don't want to be that cold about it right now," Leyland said, "but that's part of it. You would have thought it was a perfect time for him."

The Tigers still have home-field advantage in the division series to play for, and a loss after locking down their first playoff spot since 2006 is hardly alarming. But it was a contrast to something Leyland talked about earlier.

"The day after the Phillies clinched their spot," Leyland said, "they went out and won a doubleheader. I really admired that."

The Tigers, however, came up relatively empty against left-hander Gio Gonzalez (14-12). The only run they scored before their two-run ninth was on Jhonny Peralta's sacrifice fly in the sixth inning.

Don Kelly's double off Andrew Bailey drove in both runs in the ninth.

The sixth was an inning, though, in which the Tigers had the bases loaded with one out, down by three, and came away with only one run.

Not an entirely wasted chance, but out of character when compared to the September roll they've been on.

Granted, it's difficult to regroup for a day game after partying the previous night for winning a division for the first time since 1987.

But the Tigers, with substantial assistance from Gonzalez, made it look every bit as difficult as it is.

Porcello allowed three runs on nine hits in seven innings, but took the loss. He's 14-9 with two starts remaining in the regular season.

Getting off to a rough start, Porcello gave up three runs in the first three innings, including one on an RBI single by former Tiger Scott Sizemore.

After falling behind 3-0 in the third, however, Porcello settled down to pitch four scoreless innings.

"He gave us a chance," Leyland said. "Without those add-on runs, who knows?"

Comerica Park shop open Sunday to sell championship gear

September 18, 2011

By Tony Paul / The Detroit News

Detroit — Well that didn't take long.

Barely six hours after the Tigers clinched their first American League Central title on the West Coast late Friday night, the ballclub has started selling commemorative merchandise.

The D Shop at Comerica Park opened at 6 a.m. Saturday, so fans could get their hands on AL Central champion t-shirts and caps.

Detroit is the first team to put the merchandise on sale, as it was the first team in baseball to clinch a division title in 2011. Only the Phillies are already officially in the playoffs; they just haven't clinched the National League East yet.

The D Shop will have extended hours all weekend. It will re-open at 10 a.m. Sunday and stay open until 6 p.m. It will be open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Wednesday.

Merchandise also can be purchased at tigers.com

Detroit Tigers impressed with post-celebration cleanup job in visitors clubhouse at Oakland Coliseum

September 18, 2011

By Chris Iott / Booth Newspapers

The smell of victory? Late Friday night, the visitors clubhouse at the Oakland Coliseum smelled like a tire fire broke out at the site of a champagne tanker spill.

A thick cloud of cigar smoke filled the the clubhouse as champagne puddled on the floor. At one point, Daniel Schlereth, Phil Coke and Justin Verlander used the champagne-soaked plastic that covered the floor as a makeshift slip-n-slide.

On Saturday morning, the clubhouse was transformed back into a clubhouse. Pitcher Doug Fister noticed the difference as soon as he walked in.

“They did a pretty good job covering up and cleaning up,” Fister said. “Now it’s back to business.”

Leyland would not reveal who gave him the cigar he was smoking, but Verlander said relief pitcher Jose Valverde was the one who was handing them out.

Apparently, they were good ones.

“Beyond my price range,” Leyland said.

Someone told Verlander about Leyland’s comment. He agreed.

“Maybe mine, too,” he said.

Detroit Tigers starters want homefield advantage in playoffs, not rest

September 18, 2011

By Chris Iott / Booth Newspapers

OAKLAND — Miguel Cabrera did not even wait until Saturday morning to make it clear that he wanted to play Saturday afternoon, one day after the Detroit Tigers clinched their first division title in 24 seasons.

In fact, he did not even wait until the division-clinching game was complete Friday night.

“He told Gene Lamont at third base last night,” Tigers manager Jim Leyland said. “He said, ‘Hey, make sure you tell Skip I want to play tomorrow. I’m playing tomorrow.’ ”

The Tigers accomplished one of their goals late Friday night with their 3-1 victory against the Oakland A’s. But now they have homefield advantage in their sights.

“We don’t need a day off right now,” Cabrera said. “We need to keep playing. We’re playing for something. We’re playing now to get homefield advantage and to have the best record. We need to go out there and play hard.”

Cabrera was not the only one to let Leyland know that he intended to play.

“Victor Martinez came in and whispered in my ear, ‘I’m playing tomorrow,’ ” Leyland said, smiling. “I said, ‘Well, doesn’t the manager decide who plays?’ ”

The Tigers trailed the New York Yankees by three games and led the Texas Rangers by two games heading into play Saturday.

The two division winners with the best records will have homefield advantage in the American League Division Series. The division-winning team with the best record would have homefield advantage in the AL Championship Series.

“We’d like to try to get homefield advantage,” Leyland said. “So we’re going to continue to play, and we’re going to continue to play hard. Then we have some other things that we have to sit down and make some important decisions on. Rosters. Rotations.”

Tigers struggle to get key hits early in 5-3 loss to A's

September 18, 2011

By Chris Iott / Detroit Free Press

OAKLAND — The Detroit Tigers came through in the clutch repeatedly and averaged almost seven runs per game during their recent 12-game winning streak that helped them pull away in the American League Central Division race.

A day after clinching the division title, the Tigers struggled to get key hits when they needed them and suffered a 5-3 loss to the Oakland A's.

“We had guys out there,” Tigers manager Jim Leyland said. “We didn't get them in.”

The Tigers have lost two of three to Oakland and will go for a split of the four-game series today with ace Justin Verlander to the mound.

The Tigers had a difficult time stringing together hits against A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez, who allowed eight hits — all singles — in seven innings.

The Tigers were 1-for-7 with runners in scoring position through eight innings, and even that one hit did not score a run. It was a single by Victor Martinez with one out in the sixth inning that loaded the bases.

The Tigers scored their first run when Jhonny Peralta hit a sacrifice fly to left field to cut Oakland's lead to 3-1. Leyland played several of his regulars in a day game following an emotional celebration the night before. He said he felt like the Tigers played a good game, but he did admit that the events of the past 24 hours had been a bit draining.

“Hopefully they'll get some good rest tonight,” Leyland said. “It's a pretty emotional thing, really.”

Porcello was asked when he was able to put the events of Friday night behind him.

“When I went out there to get ready for the game,” he said. “Last night was over with. We've still got some baseball to play. We're still trying to win games and better our position going into the playoffs.

“I knew I had this start today. Regardless of what happened (Friday) night, I was going to be ready for it. It didn't have any effect on the way I went about it.”

The A's sent seven batters to the plate and scored two runs in the second inning. Former Tigers infielder Scott Sizemore and Coco Crisp had RBI singles for Oakland.

The A's loaded the bases with nobody out in the third inning, but Porcello limited the damage to just one run, which came on a one-out sacrifice fly by Kurt Suzuki to make it 3-0.

“The first couple of innings were rocky,” Porcello said. “I was having trouble settling in, but I think I settled down after that and was able to pitch pretty well. It was OK. It wasn't terrible, but it wasn't outstanding either.”

The A's scored a pair of runs in the bottom of the eighth inning off relief pitcher Ryan Perry to make it 5-1. Perry entered the game with two outs and nobody on base, but allowed two runs on three hits and one walk before getting the final out.

“The two add-on runs were killers,” Leyland said. “I'm a little disappointed. Obviously, this is the time to look around. ... We're smelling around.”

Leyland was asked if “smelling around” meant that he was looking to make some decisions regarding the bullpen when it comes to setting a playoff roster.

“I don't want to be that cold about it right now,” Leyland said, “but that's part of it.”

Leyland has not openly discussed specifics when it comes to a potential roster for the American League Division Series. But it seems logical — if Al Alburquerque is healthy — that Leyland will have a difficult time putting both Perry and David Pauley, who are both right-handers, on the playoff roster.

The two runs the A's scored against Perry proved to be costly. The Tigers scored a pair of runs when Don Kelly doubled home two runs in the top of the ninth to make it 5-3.

The double by Kelly was the 11th hit of the game but the first for extra bases.

Gonzalez (14-12) allowed one run on eight hits and two walks in seven innings. He struck out four.

Porcello (14-9) gave up three runs and nine hits, walked three and struck out four in seven innings. He entered the game with a 3-0 record and a 3.08 ERA in his previous four starts and suffered his first loss since Aug. 15.

The Tigers had won in each of Porcello's previous five starts.

Magglio Ordonez had three singles in four at-bats to lead the Tigers.

Detroit Tigers face tough roster decisions for playoffs

September 18, 2011

By Chris Iott / Booth Newspapers

The Tigers will have some tough decisions when it comes to putting together a playoff roster.

The Tigers currently have 17 position players and 15 pitchers on their active roster. They used 14 position players and 11 pitchers during the 2006 playoffs.

“Somebody’s going to be upset,” Leyland said. “Somebody’s going to be mad at me. That’s OK.”

One of the decisions the Tigers will have to make is whether they want to carry catcher Omir Santos as a backup to starter Alex Avila since Martinez has not played catcher after suffering a knee injury in the first week of August.

The playoff roster will be one of the topics of discussion when Leyland meets with general manager Dave Dombrowski and other members of the organization in a meeting scheduled to take place early this week when the team is in Kansas City.

“As sweet as it was last night, I’ll be telling somebody shortly that they’re not on the roster,” he said. “But that’s your job as a manager.”

Leyland still mum on roster for postseason

September 18, 2011

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Tigers manager Jim Leyland didn't want to discuss the decisions looming for making out the postseason roster until Detroit actually earned a spot in the postseason. Now that they're in, he'll discuss them to a point.

"I think guys can figure out the bulk of it," Leyland said. "I think there's only going to be a couple issues."

For the sake of suspense for advance scouts, the Tigers aren't likely to reveal their final decisions until the last few days, including a postseason rotation. He admittedly plans on slotting Justin Verlander at the top, but that's about all he would give.

Doug Fister and Max Scherzer will surely be in the rotation, but the order isn't quite certain. After that, the Tigers have to decide on a fourth starter, which isn't yet clear.

Rick Porcello started on Saturday. Brad Penny had an unselfish outlook on the question when asked Saturday morning.

"I want to win," Penny said. "So [it's about] whatever I can do to help the team win."

Tigers ready to go day after celebration

OAKLAND -- The Tigers hadn't even clinched the American League Central yet Friday night when Miguel Cabrera made his intentions clear about playing Saturday afternoon.

"He's on a mission," manager Jim Leyland said. "He told [coach] Gene Lamont at third base last night, 'Hey, tell skip I want to play tomorrow.'"

Others waited until after the game, amidst the celebration.

"Victor Martinez whispered in my ear, 'I want to play tomorrow.' I'm saying, 'Doesn't the manager decide who's going to play?'"

He does, but he also doesn't think twice when his two best hitters are asking to play in the day game after the division-clinching night game.

The Tigers wrapped up their first division title since 1987, but they still have a race going for a first or second seed in the AL playoffs and home-field advantage for the Division Series and potentially beyond. They entered Saturday with a two-game lead on the Rangers for the two seed, and crept within three games of the Yankees for home field throughout the AL playoffs.

It did not take the Tigers long to shift their attention. Even with the memories of the division celebration fresh in their minds -- well, most of them -- players, coaching staff and front-office members already were looking beyond.

For veterans such as Brad Penny who won it all with the 2003 Marlins, it wasn't hard.

"That's not the real fun," Penny said of Friday's celebration. "The real fun is in the end. They always say you want to smoke four cigars and drink champagne four times."

Early clinch brings some relief to Dombrowski

OAKLAND -- Tigers president/general manager Dave Dombrowski was talking with reporters Saturday morning in the visiting dugout at Oakland Coliseum when somebody pointed out the Indians-Twins score on the out-of-town scoreboard. For the first time since maybe April, Dombrowski didn't have to give a second thought about it.

For Dombrowski, whose tradition of reading the box scores every morning is well known, it was a good feeling.

"It's like, right now, we don't have to worry about our division anymore," Dombrowski said. "Now we can try to finish with the best record over Texas or even the Yankees. But it's a situation where, yes, it is a good feeling to say, 'So what?' It is really good. I wish them both well."

Among the multitudes of text messages and emails he received when the Tigers clinched was an email of congratulations and best wishes in the playoffs from Twins general manager Bill Smith. Given their longtime friendship, plus the memorable Twins-Tigers races over the last six years, it meant a lot to him.

He took a little extra satisfaction that many didn't expect his team to end up here.

"We're 13 1/2 games in first, and I don't think many people picked us to win the division," Dombrowski said.

"There might have been a couple. I remember sitting there at the All-Star break, we were watching [the All-Star Game] with my family and two kids and my wife. We're watching all the shows, and nobody picked the Tigers to win. Most people picked the White Sox or the Indians.

"Well, that's good,' my wife said. 'Everybody's looking past us, and that's probably better.' But that shows you, the guys have really done a tremendous job."

When asked about the 12-game winning streak that propelled them out of reach, Dombrowski said, "You sometimes shake your head in amazement when they go on a roll like that. It's hard to believe it now."

As much as the messages from around the industry meant, the congratulations from the team were more special for him. He was in the clubhouse during the postgame celebration Friday and was hugging his ace, Justin Verlander, when fellow starter Max Scherzer poured champagne over his boss' head.

Dombrowski laughed and hugged Scherzer.

"I think he started it," Dombrowski said. "There were others. You'll take that. You'll take that burning in your eyes and the dousing of champagne. I hope we do it a few more times this year."

'Moneyball' not on Leyland's must-see list

OAKLAND -- It's impossible to sit through a game at Oakland Coliseum without being inundated by reminders that the movie "Moneyball" opens next Friday in theaters. The A's, in fact, will be giving away "Moneyball" T-shirts to celebrate on Sunday. It does not sound like many Tigers plan on checking it out.

Manager Jim Leyland said his wife might go, but it won't be with him.

Leyland did not read the book, though his wife did. He has heard plenty about the philosophies behind it. He was asked about the topic Saturday morning, and while he has a well-earned image as an old-school manager, he has a use for specialized statistics.

The difference, he said, is that he emphasizes different stats than those who follow the Moneyball philosophy.

"I respect baseball people, and I respect [A's general manager] Billy Beane, but I'm not a big on-base percentage guy," he said. "I just happen to be a slugging-percentage guy. If you look at my team right now, who makes our money? [Miguel] Cabrera, [Victor] Martinez, they make a lot.

"I don't want to sound disrespectful, because I am [respectful]. I think it's a nice concept, and I'm sure there's very intelligent stuff. But, like I said, I'm a slugging-percentage guy."

Tigers president/general manager Dave Dombrowski said he has read the book, and understands the strong opinions it created on both sides.

Fister back to work early day after Tigers clinch

OAKLAND -- Tigers pitcher Doug Fister normally runs a few miles just about every day as part of his training routine, which usually makes him one of the early arrivals at the ballpark, home and road. He was among the first in the clubhouse Saturday, hours after he and others inundated it with champagne and cigar smoke into the early hours of Saturday morning.

"It doesn't smell that bad in here [now]," he said.

More important than the scent of the clubhouse after that celebration, though, was the feel of it for him. Though Fister wasn't a part of this team at the start of its run toward the American League Central title, he was at the heart of the celebration after he hurled eight strong innings to get the win in the clincher. Nearly everyone, he said, poured champagne on the 6-foot-8 right-hander, including 5-foot-9 Will Rhymes.

It was the latest example of the welcome that has allowed him to settle in and become a key cog on this team. Fister was acquired at the Trade Deadline in a deal with the Mariners.

"We have a camaraderie in this clubhouse that's unbelievable," Fister said. "It's unlike any other clubhouse. When you talk about feeling so welcome so quickly, these guys opened up your arms, opened up their home for us to come in and be a part of it real quick.

"We were all close, but last night, those kind of experiences bring a group so tight and so together that there's not much that takes us apart right now."

Worth noting

- Magglio Ordonez's three-hit game Saturday extended his hitting streak to 14 games, the longest active streak in the Majors. He's batting .400 (20-for-50) over that stretch.
- Tigers manager Jim Leyland said he's considering giving a day off to Austin Jackson, whose 0-for-4 game Saturday extended his hitless streak to 17 at-bats. He's 4-for-46 (.087) with 21 strikeouts over his last 12 games.
- Miguel Cabrera said he had three hard-hit balls Saturday, but ended up going 0-for-3 to drop his batting average to .333. He's four points behind Boston's Adrian Gonzalez for the American League lead.
- Leyland said he stayed inside his office for most of the clinching celebration Friday night. When told a few players were sliding on the plastic covering laid on the clubhouse floor to keep the champagne out of the carpet, Leyland said he knew and he "wasn't too happy" about that. "I didn't go out there too much," he said, "because I didn't want to know what was going on."

Verlander going for 24th win against A's

September 18, 2011

By Spencer Fordin / MLB.com

The Tigers have two weeks to enjoy a great achievement and prepare for the playoffs. Detroit, which clinched its first division championship since 1987 on Friday night, will match Justin Verlander against Oakland's Guillermo Moscoso in the series finale on Sunday.

Verlander hasn't thrown a no-decision since May 24, and he's won each of his last 11 starts while holding hitters to a .192 average in that span. Verlander has completed at least six innings in every start this season and leads the American League in wins (23), ERA (2.36) and strikeouts (238).

The A's, meanwhile, are playing to end one streak and give themselves a positive end to a trying campaign. Oakland has gone seven straight months without a winning record -- a skid that dates all the way back to August of 2010 -- but has gone 9-7 thus far in September.

Oakland has hit just 105 home runs, the third-lowest total in the AL and the team's worst mark since hitting 100 homers in 1978. The A's will play host to Texas next week, and manager Bob Melvin wants to evaluate younger players like Chris Carter, Michael Taylor and Jai Miller.

Moscoso took a no-hitter into the eighth inning two starts ago, and he's pitched well for the A's this season. The right-hander has gone 6-2 with a 2.50 ERA at home, compared to 2-6 with a 4.82 mark on the road.

The Tigers have roared out to a 23-6 record since Aug. 19, and they've won 25 of their last 37 games on the road. Designated hitter Victor Martinez has 17 RBIs in his last 16 games, and Miguel Cabrera is on the verge of becoming the fifth Tiger to break 100 runs, walks and RBIs in a season.

Tigers: Valverde shutting games down

Jose Valverde didn't get a chance to pitch Saturday, but he extended his franchise record to 45 consecutive saves converted in Friday's series opener. Valverde has finished 65 of his 69 appearances this season, and he's held the opposition scoreless 58 times.

Valverde leads the AL and can set a new career high with three more saves. The right-hander has eight saves in his last 10 games and has allowed just two home runs in the second half.

A's: Matsui to get some rest

Hideki Matsui went hitless in Saturday's victory, and Melvin said he'd like to rest the veteran a bit down the stretch. The 37-year-old is currently posting career lows in batting average (.255), on-base (.327) and slugging percentage (.388), but the A's have been impressed with his work.

"He's played a lot. I'd like to give him a handful of games off," said Melvin. "He might have swung at a couple pitches out of the zone, and that's an indication he's tired, which is normal for some of the veteran players at this time of the year. What he has done this year is notable."

Worth noting

- Detroit has won a division title four times since divisional play began in 1969.
- Hank Greenberg, Charlie Gehringer, Rocky Colavito and Norm Cash have all finished with 100 runs, RBIs and walks for the Tigers.
- The A's are 47-21 when scoring first this season.

Tigers can't back solid Porcello against A's

September 18, 2011

By Eric Gilmore / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Some 14 hours after their American League Central-clinching party ended, the Tigers went back to work Saturday afternoon against the A's.

Talk about a buzz kill.

The Tigers lost, 5-3, to Oakland, and they had the perfect excuse, having to play a game so soon after an emotional night in which they won a division crown for the first time since 1987 and celebrated in their clubhouse with champagne, beer and cigars.

The Tigers refused to use it.

"We don't worry about that," Tigers first baseman Miguel Cabrera said. "We came in prepared to play today. We didn't have a lot of luck."

It's not as if the Tigers mailed this game in. Manager Jim Leyland gave a handful of regulars the day off, but most of the hitters who powered the Tigers' playoff push, including Cabrera and Victor Martinez, were in the lineup.

According to Leyland, both of them either told him face-to-face Friday night or relayed word that they wanted to play Saturday.

Left fielder Delmon Young, third baseman Wilson Betemit, second baseman Ramon Santiago and catcher Alex Avila -- all in the lineup Friday night -- got the day off, with Ryan Raburn, Brandon Inge, Danny Worth and Omir Santos starting on Saturday.

Leyland found a handful of positives, including a two-run rally in the ninth and right-hander Rick Porcello's performance, allowing three runs over seven innings. Porcello struggled early before settling down in his ongoing audition for a spot in the postseason rotation.

"It was still a good day for me, because I thought Porcello pitched pretty well," Leyland said. "He got a little shaky there early with command, but he got going pretty good, and I thought he actually pitched well. He got some good work in. I was happy with that. He pitched good. He certainly gave us a chance. If we don't have the add-on runs, who knows? It might be different, but you never know."

Porcello left the game trailing 3-1, but the A's scored twice in the eighth off reliever Ryan Perry, who replaced Phil Coke with two outs and none on. Leyland said if the Tigers hadn't already clinched, he probably would have left Coke in, but he wanted to see how Perry responded with two right-handed hitters coming up. Perry walked Kurt Suzuki and gave up a single to Scott Sizemore. Then he gave up back-to-back RBI singles to Jemile Weeks and Coco Crisp.

"You clinched, so you think it's the perfect time, really," said Leyland, who has decisions to make on his postseason roster. "You've got two outs and a couple right-handed hitters coming. But that's OK. We just didn't get the big hits today."

The Tigers had eight hits and some loud outs against A's left-hander Gio Gonzalez, an AL All-Star this season, but he held them to a lone run over seven innings, striking out four and improving to 14-12.

Porcello gave up two runs in the second and one in the third before getting into a groove and blanking the A's for the next four innings. He gave up nine hits, walked three and struck out four over seven innings, throwing 110 pitches.

"Obviously, the first couple innings were a little rocky," Porcello said. "I think I settled down after that and was able to pitch pretty well. Got those two runs on some hits -- a broken-bat hit and that stuff. There's nothing you can do about that. For the most part it was OK. It wasn't terrible, but it wasn't outstanding either."

Porcello joined in the celebration Friday night, but he said he still got enough rest before his start.

"When I went out there to get ready for the game, last night was over with," Porcello said. "We still got some baseball to play. We're still trying to win games and better our position going into the playoffs."

The Tigers looked like they were headed for a big inning in the first after Ordonez and Raburn hit back-to-back singles with one out and Cabrera scorched a line drive to right. But Cabrera's laser went right to David DeJesus, and he doubled off Ordonez, who had rounded third. Cabrera ripped another line drive to right with two runners on in the sixth, but DeJesus made a diving catch.

"When you see that, you start thinking, 'Oh, no, it's going to be a tough game,'" Cabrera said of his first-inning out.

The A's took a 2-0 lead in the second. With one out, first baseman Brandon Allen lined a single to center, then Porcello walked Suzuki. Sizemore lined a single to right, scoring Allen. Porcello struck out Weeks, but Crisp blooped an RBI single to center.

Porcello got into more trouble in the third but limited the damage to one run. Josh Willingham and DeJesus opened the frame with back-to-back singles, and Cliff Pennington reached on what was intended to be a sacrifice bunt, barely beating Inge's throw. With one out, Suzuki brought Willingham home with a sacrifice fly to center, making it 3-0.

The Tigers finally got to Gonzalez for a run in the sixth, cutting the lead to 3-1. Ordonez led off with a single and moved to second on Raburn's bunt single. With one out, Martinez hit a soft single to center, loading the bases. Jhonny Peralta brought Ordonez home on a sacrifice fly to left, but Gonzalez retired Inge on a fly to center for the third out.

"Everybody came here ready to play," said Ordonez, who had three hits and extended his hitting streak to 14 games. "Gio pitched a good game. It had nothing to do with last night or what happened last night. We're professional. We try to win."

The Tigers rallied in the ninth off A's closer Andrew Bailey. Pinch-hitter Don Kelly hit a two-run double, but Bailey struck out pinch-hitter Avila and Austin Jackson to end the game.

"I thought this was a pretty good game, actually," Leyland said. "We had guys out there. We didn't get them in. They had guys out there, too. They found a way to get a couple more of them in. I thought Ricky pitched very well. The two add-on runs were killer."

Tigers fall to A's day after clinching

September 18, 2011

By Dana Wakiji / FOXSportsDetroit.com

On second thought, maybe the Tigers should have asked to have Saturday's game go back to not being on television.

Not too many hours after clinching the American League Central Division title, the Tigers had another game to play against the Oakland A's, a day game at that.

Manager Jim Leyland gave several of his regulars a break, but Austin Jackson was still in center field, Miguel Cabrera was still at first, Victor Martinez was still the designated hitter and Jhonny Peralta was still at shortstop. It wasn't quite enough as the A's prevailed, 5-3.

Rick Porcello (14-9) looked to be having fun during the post-game celebration Friday night but not so much as Saturday's starter.

Porcello allowed three runs on nine hits while walking three and striking out four in seven innings.

Former Tiger Scott Sizemore had an RBI single for the first run in the bottom of the second. Coco Crisp drove in Kurt Suzuki in the same inning for a 2-0 lead.

In the bottom of the third, Suzuki's sacrifice fly scored Josh Willingham as the A's took a 3-0 lead.

The Tigers weren't able to do very much against A's starter Gio Gonzalez, managing one run in the sixth inning on Peralta's sacrifice fly that scored Magglio Ordonez, who was 3-for-4. The Tigers did have their chances with two on in the first, third and fourth innings, plus the bases loaded in the sixth.

Gonzalez (14-12) also went seven innings, allowing just the one run on eight hits while walking two and striking out four. In his previous four starts against the Tigers, Gonzalez was 0-3 with a 6.87 ERA. But this season, Gonzalez had not allowed a run in six innings in one start against Detroit.

The A's got what Leyland calls "add-on runs" in the bottom of the eighth. Phil Coke got the first two outs of the inning. Then Ryan Perry came in and walked Suzuki. He then gave up RBI singles to Sizemore and Crisp, making it 5-1.

Don Kelly, no worse for wear after the Friday night celebration, hit a two-run double off A's reliever Andrew Bailey in the top of the ninth to score Peralta and pinch-hitter Carlos Guillen, both of whom singled. But Bailey struck out pinch hitter Alex Avila and Jackson to end the game.

The Tigers still have a chance at the best record in the American League.

Unfortunately for that quest, the New York Yankees beat the Toronto Blue Jays, 7-6, Saturday, improving to 91-59. The Tigers fell to 88-64.

The Yankees have 12 regular-season games left -- one more game against the Blue Jays, a makeup game with the Twins, four games at home against the Tampa Bay Rays, three at home against the Boston Red Sox and three on the road in Tampa.

The Tigers have 10 regular-season games left -- one more game in Oakland, two in Kansas City, four at home against the Baltimore Orioles and three at home against the Cleveland Indians.

No reason the Detroit Tigers should stop at winning the AL Central

September 18, 2011

By Pat Caputo / The Oakland Press

Why stop now?

It's a question worth asking in the aftermath of the Tigers' clinching the American League Central championship in the wee hours Saturday morning, local time, with a victory at Oakland.

Six weeks ago, it would have been considered laughable to ponder.

The Tigers were 56-51 on July 30. They led the division by 1 1/2 games, but it was only because they were fortunate to be in what was increasingly being referred to as the "AL Comedy Central."

The Tigers played a late-afternoon game against the Angels that day. They called up their top minor league prospect, pitcher Jacob Turner, to make a spot start. They lost the game, but it was without question the weekend that turned the season around.

It was the day the Tigers acquired pitcher Doug Fister from the Seattle Mariners for prospects — really good ones, too. It was a calculated risk that set off a chain of events that eventually led the Tigers turning the "AL Comedy Central" into a laugher. Comedy Central hosts Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart could not have possibly delivered better punch lines than the Tigers did the last six weeks.

On July 31, in what was billed as a battle of AL's leading Cy Young Award candidates, Justin Verlander carried a no-hitter into the late innings — and beat the Angels Jered Weaver. In the process, Weaver threw a temper tantrum for the ages, firing a pitch at Tigers' catcher Alex Avila and getting tossed from the game. Verlander lost the no-hitter, but the Tigers hung on to win.

And with that, the Tigers were off.

It began a stretch during which the Tigers were 32-12 and soared by the rest of the AL Central. And while it was not technically equal to the Tigers' legendary 35-5 start during the world championship season in 1984, it was every bit as thrilling. Continued...

The Tigers won a stretch of one-run ball games. They went on the road for their only remaining series against a team with a considerably better than .500 record at the time — the Tampa Bay Rays — and won three of four games.

Verlander kept winning, but was nearly matched by Fister, who who was 6-1 with a 2.12 ERA after the trade and won the division clincher.

The Tigers' lineup just kept producing runs. Victor Martinez was uncanny knocking in runners from scoring position. Miguel Cabrera did some of his best hitting, including a walk-off home run to key a comeback from the 8-1 deficit against the White Sox. Alex Avila was an iron man behind the plate, catching game after game during an usually hot summer out of necessity because of a knee injury to Martinez. Jhonny Peralta continued to be as steady as can be. Jose Valverde never failed out of the bullpen in a save situation.

And like Fister solidified, the trade with Minnesota for Delmon Young completed the Tigers' batting order.

It wasn't just the stars coming through, either. Ramon Santiago hit a walk-off home run and played the best baseball of his career. Ryan Raburn hit a two-run homer in the ninth to set up Cabrera's shot vs. Chicago.

Austin Jackson threw out a runner at home plate from center field to end a game against Cleveland. Brandon Inge returned from the minor leagues and homered in his first trip to the plate. Later, he hit a walk-off home run to win another game.

Jackson, Raburn and Inge were widely criticized to varying degrees earlier in the season.

Nobody felt the wrath of Tiger fans and local media more than manager Jim Leyland. This was a judgment year for Leyland. His one-year contract extension in early August wasn't going to change that. The Tigers collapses in recent seasons were an issue. Leyland battled a bit with the media and seemed irritated by the fans criticisms. It didn't overwhelm him, though, at least until after the clincher when, with his voice trembling and tears welling in his eyes, he spoke of his team knowing how much the division title means to an area that, as the Super Bowl car commercial with Eminem said, "has been through hell and back."

All the doubters have fallen by the wayside. They have been crushed by the momentum of 32-12.

Don't know whether it will ever match 35-5 in Tigers' lore. Suppose it depends on whether they stop now.

But given the Tigers performance of the past six weeks, it doesn't seem as likely to end anytime soon.

Gonzalez wins 14th, A's beat Tigers

September 18, 2011

By Associated Press Staff / Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Tigers manager Jim Leyland leaned back in his chair, a plate of food nearby and a half-smoked cigar resting on his desk.

A day after Detroit clinched its first division title in nearly a quarter-century and celebrated well into the night, Leyland was looking forward to taking a much-needed break.

Sure, there's still the matter of trying to chase down the Yankees for home-field advantage in the American League, but that will have to wait for now.

Not even losing to the Oakland Athletics for the second time in three days was enough to rile the Tigers' veteran skipper.

"I'm tired," Leyland said following Detroit's 5-3 loss to the A's on Saturday.

"It was an emotional day. I'm glad we had a day game today so we can get some rest tonight."

The Tigers had 11 hits — three by Magglio Ordonez and two apiece from Ryan Raburn and Victor Martinez — but didn't have much luck getting the runners home.

The problem, according to Ordonez, wasn't lingering effects from Friday's celebration. It was Oakland starter Gio Gonzalez, who handcuffed the Tigers on one run over seven innings while getting his 14th win of the season.

"We came out here ready to play but Gio pitched a good game," Ordonez said. "It had nothing to do with last night. We're all professionals."

Coco Crisp drove in the deciding run with an RBI single over the head of shortstop Jhonny Peralta in the second inning, Josh Willingham singled twice and scored and Oakland turned three double plays in the first five innings to win for only the second time in five games.

Detroit had at least two runners on base in five innings, but came up short against Oakland's All-Star lefty.

Gonzalez, with some help from Oakland's error-prone defense, limited the damage to beat the Tigers for the first time in five career starts. He did it despite twisting his ankle trying to make a pickoff throw to second base in the first inning.

After Ordonez and Raburn hit back-to-back one-out singles, Gonzalez (14-12) tried to catch Ordonez straying off second base. He turned to throw, but slipped on the mound and appeared to roll his left ankle.

Gonzalez walked around behind the mound to test his foot, threw one warmup pitch then returned to the mound. He got out of the inning when Miguel Cabrera flew out to right fielder David De Jesus, who doubled up Ordonez at second.

"It was a good win, a good step in the right direction for us," Gonzalez said. "They were swinging the bats, being aggressive so we tried to take advantage of that. I was fortunate enough to have a few balls hit right at people."

Gonzalez pitched out of jams with two runners on in the third and fourth before Detroit loaded the bases with one out in the sixth. Peralta hit a sacrifice fly to score Ordonez, but that was all the Tigers could get.

Detroit still had the tying run at the plate in the ninth following Don Kelly's pinch-hit two-run double off Andrew Bailey.

Oakland's two-time All-Star closer, who missed 53 games earlier this year with a strained forearm, got out of it by striking out pinch-hitter Alex Avila and Austin Jackson.

"We couldn't get the big hit today," Leyland said. "We just didn't do enough. Those add-on runs (by Oakland) killed us."

No one could blame the Tigers for being a little off after toasting their AL Central title with a champagne-and-cigar celebration in the tiny visitor's clubhouse at the Oakland Coliseum. It's Detroit's first division title since 1987.

Right-hander Rick Porcello took the loss, allowing three runs over seven innings. Porcello (14-9) struck out four and walked three but was denied in his first attempt to become the second-youngest player in franchise history to reach 39 career wins before his 23rd birthday.

Gonzalez struck out four and walked two while winning for the fifth time in his past six starts. Ten of his 14 wins this season have come at the Oakland Coliseum.

Grant Balfour pitched a scoreless eighth inning and Bailey worked the ninth for Oakland.

Raburn went 2 for 4 while Victor Martinez singled twice to raise his batting average this month to .349.

The A's stranded a pair of runners in the first, then took a 2-0 lead in the second on RBI singles by Scott Sizemore and Crisp.

Oakland loaded the bases against Porcello with no outs the following inning, but Detroit's right-hander allowed only a sacrifice fly to Kurt Suzuki then got Sizemore to ground out to end the inning.

Jemile Weeks singled in Suzuki in the eighth to make it 4-1 and Crisp followed with his second RBI single.

Weeks finished 3 for 5 while Crisp and Sizemore added two hits apiece.

Notes: Porcello is winless in five career starts at the Oakland Coliseum. ... A's OF Ryan Sweeney, sidelined by a sore quad, rode a stationary bicycle before the game to test his leg. ... Injured Oakland left-hander Dallas Braden, out since undergoing season-ending surgery on his pitching shoulder, was in the team's clubhouse before the game and will accompany Oakland on its final road trip beginning Friday in Anaheim. ... The A's recalled RHP Graham Godfrey and 1B Chris Carter from Triple-A Sacramento before the game. ... Justin Verlander goes for his major league-leading 24th win in the series finale Sunday. Verlander (23-5) has only two wins in seven career starts in Oakland. ... RHP Guillermo Moscoso (8-8) is on a two-game winning streak, the longest of his career, and will go for Oakland in the finale.

Tigers stick together on way to AL Central crown

September 18, 2011

By Associated Press Staff / Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — For all his years on the top dugout step in four managerial stops, Jim Leyland has never been a believer in chemistry carrying a club. He figures that simply winning is what brings a team together.

Yet these resilient 2011 Detroit Tigers have their old-school skipper changing his tune ever so slightly. One glimpse of this group celebrating its new AL Central crown might have done the trick: puffs of cigar smoke and swigs of champagne between the hugs, handshakes and cheers.

Detroit captured its first division title since 1987 on Friday night, continuing a sensational September by securing a spot to play in October.

No question there's chemistry here, a commitment to play together despite the doubters — and plenty of on-field swagger to back it up.

Ace Justin Verlander and the Tigers are returning to the playoffs for the first time since their 2006 World Series run fell short against St. Louis.

Now, the 66-year-old Leyland is gearing up for another postseason with his rebuilt roster.

He has received key contributions from the reliable regulars like slugger Miguel Cabrera and closer Jose Valverde, the role players such as Don Kelly, and new additions Delmon Young and Doug Fister.

Everybody has been important along the way, making it all the more memorable for Leyland this time around. "That's why you coach a team," he said, emotional as ever. "This is something Donnie Kelly will never forget. That's what makes it special to me. There's a guy a lot of people don't know about, don't talk about very much." They might now. Kelly hit a solo home run in the seventh after an earlier RBI single in the Tigers' 3-1 win at Oakland on Friday night to wrap up their first division title since capturing the AL East in 1987, three years after their last World Series championship.

To think this team was eight games back and four below .500 in early May.

"At that point in the season we all believed we were a very talented team. Coming out of spring training this was one of our goals and we believed we'd be able to do this," catcher Alex Avila said. "We thought we'd get there and win the games necessary to put us in this position. It's just a lot of fun to be on this ballclub right now. This is the first step."

Leyland said he feels fortunate things clicked when they did. He has also been on the other side of it during the stretch drive.

Detroit had a 12-game winning streak before losing the series opener to the Athletics on Thursday night. In that stretch, there were two sweeps of the White Sox, one against Minnesota and another at Cleveland.

The Tigers also took three straight from the Indians from Aug. 19-21.

"If somebody would have told me 15 games before that that we'd sweep Cleveland twice, Chicago twice and Minnesota once, I'd have said, 'You're out of your mind,' and so would anybody else, I think," Leyland said.

"You always have the pressure. Sometimes it's self-inflicted, and sometimes you can't help the pressure that comes from the outside. That's why my theory has been do your job and stay positive and let the rest take care of itself. ... When you've got a good team, it's good pressure. When you've got a bad team, it's bad pressure."

Has this September success shaped the way others see the Tigers? Leyland isn't sure.

But he will be among the first to defend Detroit, and also the first to note, "I'm not saying we're some kind of perfect team."

"I don't want to come off as all of a sudden I'm popping off. That's not my style. Believe me, I'm low key. I want to lay under the weeds," Leyland said. "If you looked, even after the break, if you watched the TVs and stuff, how it was: 'The White Sox are going to win this thing. The Tigers they have bad second halves, they won't win.'"

Leyland acknowledges even he wasn't sure. Then, optimism grew as general manager Dave Dombrowski got to work making improvements.

Fister and Young have fit right in since they came aboard.

Young was acquired in a three-player deal with the Twins on Aug. 15, veteran infielder Wilson Betemit came from Kansas City for a pair of prospects in July and Jhonny Peralta at the trade deadline last year from Cleveland.

Leyland has worked to keep everybody involved. By playing everyone, "I think you win your team over," he said. "I believe they really appreciate that."

Fister sure does.

The 6-foot-8 right-hander pitched eight impressive innings in the clincher to improve to 6-1 since he joined the Tigers in a six-player trade with Seattle on July 30. He is 5-0 over his last six starts and has given Leyland another front-line starter behind Verlander, an AL Cy Young Award contender.

Fister has allowed only four earned runs in his last 44 2-3 innings for an 0.81 ERA over that stretch.

"This is very special for me. It's been a whirl of emotions all year long," Fister said. "To be able to spend this night with these guys is something that I've only dreamed of. Obviously we still have a long road ahead of us." A road Leyland is happy to be leading. He and Dombrowski each received contract extensions Aug. 8, and the Tigers have been nearly unbeatable since.

Victor Martinez, specifically, has the manager reconsidering his longtime beliefs about chemistry.

The Tigers surely wouldn't have clinched their first division title in nearly a half-century this soon without his timely swings this month. Martinez had two more hits Friday and was batting .339 (20 for 59) in 15 games during September heading into Saturday afternoon's contest.

"Victor Martinez has been huge. He's relentless. He's been a god send for us," Leyland said. "I'm not a big chemistry guy but he has helped that. ... The reason Victor's presence has meant so much is the fact he's hitting .330 and knocking in big run after big run. If Victor was hitting .230 or .240, the chemistry might not be the same."

The Tigers won Friday for the 23rd time in 28 games dating to Aug. 19 and 25th time in the club's last 36 road games.

Leyland is signed through the 2012 season. He takes pride in the fact that he is coming back when plenty of people didn't picture that scenario for this franchise moving forward.

"I've been around a long time. I don't think any one is more special than the other, but you always find a reason to make this one special," Leyland said. "This one's special to me for personal reasons. I'm just glad I'm managing the Tigers next year. There probably weren't a lot of people who thought I would be."

These Tigers have taken a big step.

They came so close two years ago, when Detroit held a three-game lead with four games left. Minnesota caught up and then handed the Tigers a heartbreaking loss in a one-game playoff for the division title. Leyland thought his '06 team should have won the Central, too.

"I think we're a good team. I think we're a legitimate opponent for anybody," he said. "I'm not all of a sudden bragging, saying, 'Oh, we're going to win everything.' Nobody's making any silly statements like that.

"I don't think anybody's saying they'll just breeze through the Tigers," he said. "I think people throughout baseball think we're a pretty good team. ... I don't think people will look at us like, 'That's a piece of cake, we'll waltz through them, who are we playing next?' At least I hope not."

Sunday, September 18, 2011

Team	Player	Transaction
Kansas City Royals	Luis Mendoza	Purchased From Minors

Saturday, September 17, 2011

Team	Player	Transaction
Oakland Athletics	Graham Godfrey	Called Up from Minors
Oakland Athletics	Chris Carter	Called Up from Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Domonic Brown	Called Up from Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Mike Zagurski	Designated for Assignment
Philadelphia Phillies	Joe Savery	Purchased From Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Juan Perez	Designated for Assignment
Philadelphia Phillies	Brandon Moss	Purchased From Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Erik Kratz	Purchased From Minors
Philadelphia Phillies	Justin De Fratus	Called Up from Minors

Friday, September 16, 2011

Team	Player	Transaction
Arizona Diamondbacks	Cole Gillespie	Called Up from Minors
Colorado Rockies	Hector Gomez	Called Up from Minors
Minnesota Twins	Francisco Liriano	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Left posterior shoulder strain)
Toronto Blue Jays	Colby Rasmus	Recalled From Minors, Rehab Assignment
Toronto Blue Jays	Colby Rasmus	Removed From 15-Day DL, (Jammed right wrist)