

SPORTS

Tigers have the best record . . .

By KIMBALL CROSSLEY
Staff Writer

Don't listen to anyone who tries to tell you that the Detroit Tigers won the American League East crown by virtue of their 35-5 start to the season.

The Tigers would have won the division even if they got off to an average start.

After all, even after those phenomenal first 40 games, when a slump or a slowdown would have been expected, the Tigers dominated the AL to the tune of a .565 winning percentage over their last 122 games. By comparison, the Toronto Blue Jays, who finished with the second best record in the AL, had a .550 winning percentage for the year.

Detroit

No doubt the start helped, but there was simply nothing stopping this young, talented team which finally put it all together this season.

Five years ago when Sparky Anderson became manager of the Tigers, he saw the young talent on the ballclub and predicted that the Tigers would be division winners in 1984. Apparently, Sparky's timetable was right on the mark.

Last year's second-place team turned in to this year's first-place team as Anderson coupled the performances of Lou Whitaker, Alan Trammell, Lance

Parrish, Larry Herndon and Jack Morris, all of whom had better years in 1983, with the performances of Kirk Gibson, Chet Lemon, Howard Johnson and Willie Hernandez, who all finally came into their own in 1984.

The Tigers are a complete team. They have great hitting, pitching and fielding. They scored more runs than any other team in the AL and they gave up the fewest. It is not easy finding a weakness on their team.

Their pitching is relatively young and deep, and their staff includes no less than four players who should fare well in the Cy Young voting: Morris (19-11, 3.59 ERA), Dan Petry (18-8, 3.24), Aurelio Lopez (10-0, 2.68, 14 saves) and Hernandez (9-2, 1.91, 32 saves).

The Tigers' everyday lineup brings meaning to the cliché of being strong up the middle, by showing that if a team can get strong offensive contributions from the normally weak hitting positions of catcher, second base, shortstop and center field, then there is virtually no stopping them from fielding a championship calibre offense.

In fact, most of the Tigers' offense comes from clean-up hitting catcher Parrish (33 home runs), lead-off hitting second baseman Whitaker (.356 on-base percentage, 13 HR, 56 RBI), shortstop Trammell (.380 OB, .314 BA, 14 HR) and center fielder Lemon (.350 OB, 20 HR, 76 RBI).

With those four, it was simply a matter of filling out the other positions. With the exception of Gibson (.363 OB, 27 HR, 91 RBI, 29 SBs) in right field and second year player Johnson (.326 OB, 12 HR, 47 RBI) at third, the team basically got below-average outputs from the usual big-offense positions of left field, first base, and designated hitter.

In left field, Larry Herndon had a terrible year (.275 BA, 7 HR) in comparison to his 1983 season (.302 BA, 20 HR), and at DH and first base the Tigers platooned and shuffled several players. The most effective was free agent pickup Darrell Evans, who at 36, having spent his career in Atlanta and San Francisco, said he came to the Tigers despite having been offered more money elsewhere because he wanted a chance at playing on a World Series winner. While Evans (.353 OB, 16 HR) is still a productive player, his contribution is no where near some of the AL's other DHs and first basemen, which include Eddie Murray, Andre Thornton, Kent Hrbek, Mike Easler, Don Mattingly and Alvin Davis.

But don't count Royals out yet

By LEE ROBERTS
Assistant Sports Editor

Talk about no respect.

The Kansas City Royals clinched their fifth American League Western Division title in nine years Friday night, but did they get applauded for this admirable feat?

Snickered at is more like it.

Kansas City

"If the sport of major league baseball had any pride it would have outlawed the American League West," one *Daily Tar Heel* columnist wrote in today's paper. *Boston Globe* sportswriter Peter Gammons coined the phrase, "the A.L. Worst" in describing the division that the Royals have pretty much monopolized since 1976.

Granted, these complaints have a certain amount of validity, seeing as the three teams in contention for this year's title (the Royals, the Twins and the Angels) seemed at times to be trying

to become the first division winner in history to have a losing record. Trying hard.

They didn't make it but they came close, however, as Kansas City finished with an 84-78 record, the worst record to win a division in the 83-year history of the American League. The 84 wins was also the second-worst record to win a division title since major league baseball began in 1876 (the New York Mets hold that distinction, stumbling their way to 82 victories in 1973). Pretty silly, huh?

From the sounds of things, the Detroit Tigers, who punished league opponents for 104 wins this season, should stomp these pitiful Royals into the Astroturf when the A.L. Championship Series begins tonight at 8 p.m. (televised on ABC) in Royals Stadium.

Before everyone starts to wager on who the Tigers will be facing in the World Series, however, a few things should be considered.

First of all, when those aforementioned stumbling Mets won the National League East in 1973, they won it from four other teams who were in contention for the pennant going into the final week. Much like these Royals, those Mets finished out their season in the heat of a highly competitive pennant race. They went on to defeat the Cincinnati Reds (managed at the time by Sparky Anderson, now the Tigers' manager), who had won 99 games that

year, and took the then-powerful Oakland A's to the seventh game of the World Series before they lost.

The Royals have been playing important games every time out since mid-August, while the Tigers, much like those Reds of 1973, haven't played a crucial series since early September.

This leads to the second point, that these Royals may have their intensity-for-the-big-game mentality honed a little sharper than the Tigers. Sometimes it's not so easy to turn the level of play up or down at whim.

One indication that the Royals have indeed sharpened their competitive blade is that they are hot. Momentum means a whole lot more in the playoffs than a 35-5 start in April and May, and Kansas City has that momentum: a 44-26 record since July 18, the best record in baseball. Better than the Cubs, better than the Padres and better than the Tigers.

And if experience in the playoffs can be considered, the Royals certainly have the edge in that department as well. Ten players remain from the 1980 A.L. Champion team, including George Brett, Willie Wilson, Dan Quisenberry, Hal McRae, U.L. Washington and Frank White.

But, as Royals' second baseman Frank White said recently, "I don't think that matters at all. You still have to pitch and hit."

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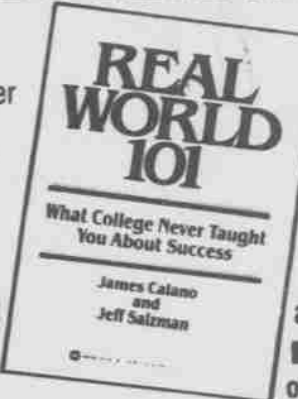
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For the record

In the story "CGC votes to withdraw student fees from TFO" in Thursday's *The Daily Tar Heel*, Sherrod Banks should have been quoted as saying he supported the government in South Africa, not the student government. The *DTH* regrets the error.

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