

**A new Manager in Leyland alongside veteran pitching additions Rogers and Jones give Tigers fan something to cheer about for at least a little while**



**4. Detroit Tigers (71-91):** Able to rebound from a 43-win campaign in 2003 – one of the worst seasons by a franchise in professional baseball history – the Tigers have now posted consecutive 70-win records and are looking for a third. Though, they won't be satisfied with just a third – they want 75-80 wins and beyond, maybe a surprise playoff appearance would captivate a city where the NBA's Pistons reign supreme. General Manager Dave Dombrowski elected to go another route in the Skipper area by hiring Jim Leyland, who replaces Allan Trammel. If it weren't for an 8-24 slide to end the season, the Tigers' offense would be perceived better than it is. They were fourth in the American League in batting and had starting pitchers Mike Maroth and Jeremy Bonderman raise some eyebrows by each winning 14 games apiece. Leyland looks forward to getting this group motivated – a challenge similar to the one he took on years back in Florida.

Detroit's biggest off-season acquisitions came in the form of two pitchers: 41-year-old lefty starter Kenny Rogers and aging reliever Todd Jones. No, this Kenny Rogers is not the singer, but rather the infamous camera man puncher. Pre camera man incident, Rogers was very effective for Texas. In fact, over the last two seasons, he's gone 22-7 before the July All-Star break. Keeping his cool, his composure will clearly be a key to go alongside Maroth, Bonderman and Nate Robertson (7-16) in that rotation. Pegged as the fifth starter for now, right-hander Justin Verlander out of Old Dominion University went rapidly from pitching in A Lakeland to the Major League level. He'll round out a staff of durable arms and high hopes. Jones, a member of the Tigers organization back in 2000, saved 42 games that season. Last year he saved 40 for the fish of Florida and soon will turn 38 years old. That's why the guys leading up to him in the pen – such as Roman Colon and Fernando Rodney – are pivotal pieces. New pitching coach Chuck Hernandez wants to get the maximum out of this group while he still can.

**Home Cooking: Detroit plays 31 of its final 53 games at Comerica Park.**

Even though there's not major concerns with the starting pitchers, there is with the batters – particularly catcher Ivan 'Pudge' Rodriguez and Magglio Ordonez. Both received a hefty amount of money to come here and haven't fully produced to their capabilities. They only combined for 22 homers and 96 RBI when in all actuality, they should be putting up those numbers separately. Extra power surges could be provided from guys like Dmitri Young, still one of the game's more underrated designated hitters, and Chris Shelton. Together they drilled 39 balls out of the park. Second baseman Placido Polanco also flies somewhat under the radar. Polanco gives them discipline at the plate, evident from striking out only 25 times in 501 at-bats. How persistent shortstop Carlos Guillen is with the bat and how well third baseman Brandon Inge does off a career year will be huge to the development of Detroit's lineup. Meanwhile, scouts are raving

about new center fielder Curtis Granderson, an absolute stud in every phase of the game down in AAA Toledo during '05. At the very worst, Detroit's bench rates out to be decent. Nook Logan had 12 sacrifices last year and brought speed to the table in the form of 23 stolen bases. Meanwhile, Carlos Pena provides power, infielder Omar Infante has okay upside and catcher Vance Wilson is a fine defensive replacement.



**Justin Verlander begins the season as the Tigers' fifth starter, but is going to have a larger role down the road.**

**Bottom Line: This batting order is filled with question marks in my mind. How many games do they get out of Pudge, Ordonez and Young? None of the three played in 130+ games last season and I'm not confident enough to put it out there that any is a given for that figure. If all three can play 130-150 games, then there's a solid chance the Tigers make serious noise in the AL Central. But that's a big if, despite strong support from a starting staff which ought to eat plenty of innings. Getting the same production from Jones (meaning 40 saves) in the ninth as Florida did one year ago is somewhat doubtful, too.**

**Projected Order: CF Curtis Granderson  
2B Placido Polanco  
C Ivan Rodriguez  
RF Magglio Ordonez  
DH Dmitri Young  
LF Craig Monroe  
SS Carlos Guillen  
1B Chris Shelton  
3B Brandon Inge**

**Projected Staff: L Kenny Rogers  
R Jeremy Bonderman  
L Mike Maroth  
L Nate Robertson  
R Justin Verlander**

***Pick: 4<sup>th</sup> in the AL Central; finish four to six games back of Minnesota.***