

TRADE DEADLINE & THE STRETCH RUN

Tigers' Deadline Bullpen Overhaul Is Paying Off as Detroit Turns Toward October

With the division essentially wrapped up, GM Jeff Greenberg spent July mining the farm system for arms instead of headlines — and through the season's first month of results, every one of them has delivered.

By **Marcus Delaney**, Tigers Beat Writer

DETROIT — August 2031

The Detroit Tigers didn't need to make headlines at the trade deadline. At 84–45 and sitting 21 games clear of the field in the AL Central, this is a team that has already punched its October ticket in every way but mathematically — the magic number sits at 13. So when general manager Jeff Greenberg spent the final week of July working the phones, he wasn't shopping for a savior. He was shopping for depth, and he found it without touching a single piece of his big-league core.

Over five separate moves on deadline day alone, the Tigers leaned on a farm system stocked deep with arms to bring in four MLB-ready relievers. Right-hander Cole Henry arrived from St. Louis for prospects John Heinonen and Antonio Salazar. Isaac Coffey came over from Arizona in exchange for left-hander Yoldin De La Paz, with third baseman Luke Jaeger and righty Elijah Scott coming back in the same deal. St. Louis sent right-hander Hunter Gaddis and outfield prospect Dou-guan Foong to Detroit for John Griffin and Pedro Salido in a separate trade later that day. And in the move with the most sentimental value, the Tigers reacquired right-hander Alfredo Zarraga from Washington — the same club they had shipped him to back in January — for right-hander LJ McDonough. A smaller deal nine days earlier had already sent veteran Dylan Smith to the Mets for a package headlined by second baseman Bill Powers, first baseman Louis Wood and right-hander Sam Corson, and Detroit also parted with 17-year-old arm Ivan Lopez to pry 20-year-old shortstop Cortez Cordova loose from San Diego, banking a bit more upside for the middle infield of the future.

The early returns have been about as good as a front office could ask for. Coffey has been untouchable in his first taste of Detroit relief work — 10 innings, seven strikeouts, three walks and, remarkably, zero earned runs allowed. Zarraga has looked every bit the pitcher the Tigers regretted parting with, going 2–0 with a 2.00 ERA and two holds in his second stint with the club. Henry has settled in as steady middle relief with a 2.25 ERA across his first six outings. Gaddis has yet to make his Detroit debut through the most recent box scores, but the early group has already given the bullpen exactly the kind of low-cost reinforcement a runaway division leader wants heading into the stretch.

BY THE NUMBERS

RECORD

84–45

.651 · 1st, AL Central

DIVISION LEAD / MAGIC NO.

21.0 / 13

33 games remaining

Deadline Arrivals

Isaac Coffey	0.00 ERA
Alfredo Zarraga	2–0, 2.00
Cole Henry	2.25 ERA
Hunter Gaddis	awaiting debut

Summer Standouts

McGonigle (SS)	.323/.880
Skubal (LHP)	15–4, 2.61
Rodriguez (CL)	34 SV, 1.99
Petry (1B)	30 HR

THE SUMMER'S BEST

If the deadline additions have been the story of the last month, the story of the summer belongs to Kevin McGonigle. The Tigers' shortstop is hitting .323 with a .391 on-base percentage, 10 home runs and — the number that jumps off the page — 59 stolen bases, tying him with closer Bradgley Rodriguez atop the team lead in win probability added. It's the kind of all-around season that gets a player mentioned among the league's best, delivered while he anchors the infield defensively night after night.

McGonigle hasn't carried the offense alone. Ethan Petry has punished mistakes all year, his 30 home runs and .551 slugging percentage the loudest bat in the middle of the order. Walker Jenkins has paired 17 homers with 48 stolen bases in right field, and Max Clark's do-everything game in center — a .798 OPS to go with 21 home runs and 48 steals of his own — has quietly been worth nearly two and a half wins by itself.

“Nobody feels the need to talk about the dugout, because the record does it for them.”

On the mound, the rotation has been the backbone of the whole operation. Tarik Skubal has been every bit the ace, going 15–4 with a 2.61 ERA, while Guo-fang Hou has eaten the most innings on the staff and racked up 194 strikeouts to go with a 2.57 ERA of his own. Jackson Jobe, still establishing himself as a full-time starter, has been nearly as good at 9–2, 2.68. And behind all of them, Rodriguez has been automatic at the back of the bullpen — 34 saves, a 1.99 ERA, and a knack for the moment that has turned the ninth inning into a formality more nights than not.

THE STRETCH RUN

With 33 games left on the schedule and a division lead that's essentially academic, the conversation in Detroit has already shifted from whether the Tigers will make it to what happens once they get there. Barring a historic collapse, the remaining questions are about seeding, health, and how the club shapes its roster for October — including whether Eury Perez and Sheng-En Lin, both currently in the rotation mix but scuffling by the staff's own high standards, keep their spots once the games start to matter most.

Fan expectations have climbed accordingly. A team that opened the year hoping simply to contend is now being talked about, openly and often, as a legitimate championship favorite — and patience for anything short of a deep October run has thinned considerably as the winning has piled up.

That optimism extends to the coaching staff, who have mostly worked outside the spotlight even as the results speak for themselves. Pitching coach Bob Brucato has overseen a staff ERA that ranks among the best in baseball, and hitting coach Yoshiki Otsuka's fingerprints are all over an offense that pairs power with a running game few teams can match. Bench coach Brian N. Anderson's in-game work has drawn quiet praise from inside the organization, and ownership — with Christopher Ilitch continuing to back the payroll behind these moves — has given Greenberg the room to make them. It is rare for a coaching staff to go this unnoticed in the middle of a 21-game division lead, but in Detroit that is being taken as the highest compliment there is.

With one month to go, the only real drama left may be how much history this team is capable of writing.