

AUGUST RECAP

August Onslaught Trims Tigers' Magic Number to Five

A 20–8 month keeps Detroit's AL Central lead north of 20 games, with Juan Soto and Kevin McGonigle setting the pace and the rotation barely blinking.

By Marcus Delaney, Tigers Beat Writer

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The Detroit Tigers have spent most of 2031 making the American League Central look like an afterthought, and August did nothing to change that. Detroit went 20–8 over the month, its best 28-game stretch of the season, and enters September at 90–48 with a 20.5-game lead over second-place Cleveland. The magic number, which sat at 13 when this publication last checked in at the trade deadline, has fallen to five. Barring the sort of collapse this roster has given no indication of, the Tigers will be printing division-champion merchandise before the leaves change.

The offense set the tone. Juan Soto was the best hitter in the sport for a month that mattered only in the sense that Detroit wanted to keep padding win totals — a .333/.510/.694 line with seven home runs, 15 RBI and more walks (26) than strikeouts (15) across 20 games. Kevin McGonigle matched him blow for blow in a different way, hitting .414 with a .431 on-base percentage while doing what he always does: playing shortstop like a Gold Glover and running the bases like nobody in the dugout has the heart to stop him. Ethan Petry supplied the thunder, launching eight home runs in August to push his season total to 33, and his .741 slugging percentage for the month was the loudest number on the stat sheet not attached to McGonigle's legs.

Not everyone kept pace. Max Clark, who has quietly been one of the most complete players in the league this season (.780 OPS, 22 home runs, 48 steals), hit a wall in August, batting just .190 with 21 strikeouts in 63 at-bats. Hao-Yu Lee scuffled even worse, managing a .448 OPS over 15 games before a minor day-to-day issue closed out his month on the injury report. Walker Jenkins never quite found his rhythm either, hitting .184 across 18 games after a lower-body tweak in the final days of July lingered into the first week of August — though his season line (.286/.352/.479, 51 steals) is in no danger of erasing what is shaping up as a career year.

“A magic number in single digits, and it's still only September 2.”

The rotation didn't need to be perfect behind that kind of offense, and mostly it was anyway. Tarik Skubal went 2–1 with a 2.52 ERA and 31 strikeouts across four August starts, pushing his season mark to 15–4, 2.76. Jackson Jobe (2.96 ERA in August, 10–3, 2.72 on the year) and workhorse Guo-fang Hou, who leads

BY THE NUMBERS

RECORD

90–48

.652 · 1st, AL Central

DIVISION LEAD / MAGIC NO.

20.5 / 5

24 games remaining

August Standouts

Soto (1B/DH)	1.204 OPS
McGonigle (SS)	.414 AVG
Skubal (LHP)	2-1, 2.52 ERA
Rodriguez (CL)	6 SV, 1.80 ERA
Petry (1B)	8 HR

the staff with 203 strikeouts, gave Detroit length behind him. The bullpen stayed lights-out: Bradgley Rodriguez posted a 1.80 ERA with six saves in August and is now 37-for-41 in save chances with a 1.91 ERA on the season, while trade-deadline pickup Isaac Coffey still has not allowed an earned run in a Tigers uniform — 15 2/3 innings and counting.

The month's strangest headline had nothing to do with the standings. Michael Arroyo was suspended alongside Tampa Bay's Craig Yoho after benches cleared during Detroit's August 11–13 series against the Rays — a footnote in an otherwise placid month for a team with almost nothing left to play for except seeding. No trades complicated the picture; Detroit's front office made its moves before the July 31 deadline and has been content to let the roster it built play out the string.

Twenty-four games remain on the schedule, and the only drama left in the Central is a matter of scheduling — the champagne could be on ice within the week. The bigger questions now belong to October: how the bullpen shakes out, whether Jenkins and Clark round back into form before games start counting for real, and whether Eury Perez and Sheng-En Lin hold their rotation spots once the games start to matter most. For now, Detroit is doing the only thing left to do in September: piling up wins and waiting for the calendar to catch up.