

SEPTEMBER RECAP SEASON WRAP

Tigers Finish 107-55, Claim AL's Best Record and a First-Round Bye

Detroit closes the regular season on a 17-7 run, wins the AL Central by 25 games, and settles in to watch the Wild Card round from the sidelines.

By Marcus Delaney, Tigers Beat Writer DETROIT -- September 2031

Detroit entered September needing five wins, or five Chicago losses, to clinch a division it had effectively owned since May, and it did not take long. The Tigers wrapped up the American League Central inside the season's first week and spent the rest of the month treating the schedule like a formality, closing on a 17-7 stretch to finish 107-55, the best record in the American League and one of the most lopsided division titles anyone in Detroit can remember. The White Sox (82-80) and Cleveland (81-81) spent the summer playing for second place; Chicago finished 25 games back, Cleveland 26. The Tigers now hold the AL's No. 1 seed and a first-round bye already banked, with the Yankees and Rangers, and the Blue Jays and Red Sox, still fighting over who gets to lose to them in the Division Series.

The lineup did not coast. Ethan Petry hit eight more home runs in September to finish the year at 41, matching his RBI total at 101, and his .654 slugging percentage for the month was the loudest bat in a loud clubhouse. Thayron Liranzo, who spent most of the summer as a complementary piece behind the plate, put together the best month of his season: .343/.390/.671 with five home runs and 18 RBI. Michael Arroyo was right behind him at .341 with five homers, 21 RBI and three more steals, pushing his season total to a team-high 71 -- the fastest player on a roster that runs as well as anyone in the league. Juan Soto did not need to chase power to stay dangerous, walking 20 times against 18 strikeouts and reaching base at a .427 clip in a stretch Detroit could afford to play loose. Walker Jenkins found his legs again after an ugly August, hitting .365 with 13 stolen bases, while Max Clark added ten more steals of his own.

"Clinched in the first week, and there was still a month of baseball left to play."

Not everyone finished strong. Kevin McGonigle, who hit .414 in August and has an MVP case built on a .310 average, 79 stolen bases and an 8.1 WAR season, cooled to .253 in September -- the kind of dip that means nothing in a race Detroit had already won. Cody Bellinger never did find it, batting .189 for the month and finishing a disappointing season at .234. Both are footnotes on a roster this deep.

The rotation carried real stakes even after the race didn't. Tarik Skubal was the best pitcher in baseball for a month that mattered only for seeding, going 3-0 with a 2.05 ERA and 23 strikeouts across four starts to finish 18-4, 2.67 with 184 punchouts -- a Cy Young-caliber season by any measure. Guo-fang Hou closed out the year as the workhorse he's been all season, piling up strikeouts to finish with a team-high 233. The bullpen was the story underneath the story: Mason Fluharty did not allow a run in September (0.00 ERA, 14 strikeouts in 11 innings), Zuo-qian Ning ran his ERA down to 1.74 for the month, and closer Bradgley Rodriguez tacked on four more saves to finish with 41 and a season ERA near 1.95. Not everything was smooth: Eury Perez was rocked for a 9.00 ERA in six September appearances, Cristopher Sanchez settled for a 4.74 mark, and when the roster needed an extra arm to soak up innings in the season's final,

BY THE NUMBERS

RECORD

107-55

.660 · 1st, AL Central (clinched)

DIVISION MARGIN

+25 games

over 2nd-place Chicago

POSTSEASON

AL #1 seed

Wild Card bye · ALDS opponent TBD

SEPTEMBER STANDOUTS

Petry (1B)	41 HR, 101 RBI
Skubal (LHP)	18-4, 2.67 ERA
Liranzo (C)	.343 AVG (Sept)
Rodriguez (CL)	41 SV, 1.95 ERA
Arroyo (3B)	71 SB

lower-stakes games, emergency call-up Yordy Herrera got hit hard in two brief outings -- the kind of taxi-squad cameo that happens when a race is over and a front office is already thinking about October relievers.

Detroit's front office stayed quiet in September, as it has since the July 31 deadline, and the health report was blessedly boring: no significant injuries hit the active roster over the season's final month. The bigger questions belong to the postseason now -- who starts Game 1 of the Division Series, whether Perez or Sanchez claims the back of the playoff rotation, and which of the Yankees, Rangers, Blue Jays or Red Sox will be waiting when the bracket fills in. For a team that clinched with three weeks still on the calendar, October is finally the only thing left to play for.