

# Tigers adhere to Leyland's doctrines

As prescribed, the umpires met at home plate at 7 p.m. last night, were joined by Pirates bench coach Jim Lett carrying Jim Tracy's lineup card, and then by the manager of the mathematical and authentic best team in baseball, Jim Leyland.

If the big walk-up crowd still settling into its seats noticed, it was not apparent, and maybe too many years and way, way too many losses have gone to the archives for this exasperated city to

make any fuss for the last manager to lead its sorry baseball franchise into the postseason.

"These people are Pittsburghers," Leyland said at the start of an evident three-game weekend mismatch.

"They're loyal and they want to win. A lot of them are my friends. They might wish me

luck this weekend, but, from the bottom of their hearts, you know the bastards don't mean it."

The expanded nest of media jammed into the visiting manager's office broke into chuckles, but Leyland's enduring affection for Pittsburgh couldn't be laughed off even with a splash of the old skipper's salty rhetoric.

"I left tickets for guys who are probably going to be pullin' for the Pirates," he said, "and probably be booin' me, too."

No one on the banks of the Allegheny these days is in any mood for the what-if game, and Leyland fit right in last night, eschewing any discussion of the poor little Pirates, saying he had all he could handle with these Tigers by the tail. Sure, he was available briefly last fall while Pete Mackanin was vacuuming Lloyd McClendon's just-vacated office, and, sure, he seemed a logical choice to some, if not to Dave Littlefield, but it wouldn't have worked.

Leyland hasn't the patience or the inclination to manage Ground Zero's team, which is essentially where the Pirates remain as far as payroll is concerned. At least by the time Detroit jumped to satisfy his lust to manage again after six seasons as a scout, the Tigers had reacted to consecutive seasons as the worst team in baseball by committing the required enormous sums to key free agents like Magglio



GENE COLLIER

## Leyland's 'into' his work again

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Ordonez and Kenny Rogers.

With the Nutting-ventured, Nutting-gained Pirates, that wasn't and apparently isn't going to happen.

To say it all worked out beautifully for Leyland and nightmarishly for Tracy is much more oversimplification than understatement. The best thing that's happened to the guy who won three division titles and a World Series in the 1990s is not the American League Central-leading 54 victories the Tigers brought into the weekend, it's the vital realization that after burning out at this job during a Rocky Mountain low in 1999, he legitimately enjoys it again.

"I'm having fun because I'm into it. I'm a wild man again," he said. "I'm putting fires out, doing the things that have to be done. And that makes me feel better than anything. I don't talk to the team about winning. I talk to them about preparing to win. What I say to them is, 'play like you're in first [place], and prepare like you're in second."

"But, from a personal standpoint, I just know I'm really into it, and, if I wasn't, that would be a major disappointment."

The prepare-to-win rather than talk-about-winning bit is doctrinal Old Testament Leyland, and, almost as soon as the action started in the first game of this series, another of his familiar parables seem to hang in the summer air: the only momentum in baseball is strictly a function of the next day's starting pitcher. For the Pirates, who got a ninth-inning homer from Freddy Sanchez the day before to escape a 13-game losing streak (Sanchez was out of the lineup with back spasms last night, probably from people slapping him on it), the momentum proprietor last night was Kip Wells.

Momentum and a 1-0 Pirates lead thus lasted until the top of the second inning, when Wells served up back-to-back homers to Marcus Thames and former Pirates prospect Chris Shelton on his way to a typically dreadful performance that deteriorated to the point at which he

had allowed as many earned runs as he had outs, seven.

In three starts since his return from surgery 11 days ago, Wells has allowed 18 earned runs and 20 hits without getting through 11 innings. He has walked seven and struck out four and his earned run average is 15.19. If he were released today, it wouldn't even go into Littlefield's ledger under "questionable." He has lost 21 of his past 29 decisions dating to the beginning of last season and 28 of his past 41.

The Pirates never crawled out of the hole Wells put them in last night, and, even though they put the tying run on second in the ninth and forced Leyland out of the dugout twice, the biggest reaction of this 7-6 Detroit victory went to Nutty the Water Skiing Squirrel on the Jumbotron.

Nothing personal Skipper. That's just about where we are for available sentiment.

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