

By George Maslin observing sports

Okay, kids — and that means anybody from five to 80 — get your excuses ready.

You know what next Tuesday means — opening day at Tiger Stadium.

So there'll be a lot of grandmothers who suddenly become sick... bosses who have headaches... teachers who beg off for a few hours, etc.

Whether it's raining or snowing, whether the temperature is 60 or 30, there will be a mob at Tiger Stadium to see Billy Martin introduce his brand of Tigers against the Cleveland Indians.

Somehow, it's hard to believe that the start of baseball is here... not only for the Tigers, but even some of the area high school teams have a few games scheduled for the next 10 days or so.

THE WAY the weather has been, it's doubtful any diamonds outside of Tiger Stadium will be ready for a month.

Most fields we've passed still are frozen and the various school and recreation people don't have the funds like they do at Tiger Stadium to rip apart the ballyard and replenish it with new grass and what have you.

In a way, too, we can't figure out why big league baseball is in such a rush, when it is a well-established fact that the weather in early April anywhere in the north isn't too decent.

One has to sympathize with a Mickey Stanley or Bill Freehan or Mickey Lolich who find themselves playing in 70-degree Florida weather one day and a couple afternoons later might face 30-40 degree situations in Detroit or Baltimore or Cleveland.

OF COURSE, the answer is simple, let every team build a domed stadium.

At the Astrodome in Houston, nobody cares what the conditions are outside. Inside it's always 70 and the humidity is ideal.

Naturally, mentioning the word "stadium" is a touchy one around here. Whether we'll ever have a new one for the Tigers and Lions may be something future generations in the years 2,000 may experience.

Or, so it seems!

One thing we do know... Tiger stadium will be a chilly spot next Tuesday regardless if the temperature suddenly heats up in our neck of the woods.

It takes the old darling over at Trumbull and Michigan quite a spell to defrost from the wintery blasts and all of us know we have experienced a pretty rough few months — weather speaking — in the Greater Detroit area.

But Tiger fans don't ever seem to mind. We've been out there on opening day in the snow when it was around 40-50 and 50,000 were present.

The sports fans in these parts are itching... itching and desirous of a winner after the way the Pistons started so well and then flopped and after what the Red Wings have been through... and when we remember what happened to the Lions in the playoffs in Dallas.

What about the Tigers?

I HAVE A HUNCH... a hunch that the Tigers will do well this season, very well.

For one thing, they aren't confronted with the Denny McLain confusion which existed at this time a year ago. That had to upset the team.

Second, with no affront to Mayo Smith, new manager Billy Martin is the driving type, who can get the most out of his players.

Third, the Tigers have strengthened themselves on the left side of the infield. They finally have a classy shortstop and an equally outstanding third baseman.

Fourth, they have a strong and healthy Bill Freehan back from surgery and that is bound to help.

Fifth, they have the best outfield in the majors with the likes of Stanley, a healthy Willie Horton again, Al Kaline and Jim Northrup.

All of which leaves one question unmentioned — the all important pitching.

Somehow, we think the Tigers will have adequate hurling... even without McLain.

We shouldn't forget that last year without McLain the Tigers challenged Baltimore until July. Then, with McLain on deck, the Tigers crumbled.

From where we sit the various changes the Tigers have made — changes which range from the field boss to coaches to players — all will stand the team in good stead.

So, get those excuses ready for next Tuesday. You won't want to miss out on opening day at Tiger Stadium!



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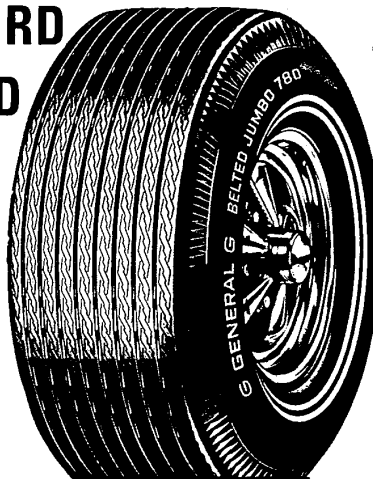
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