



# Guillen's Got Game

By Karen Buscemi Photos by Daniel Lippitt

**W**hen Carlos Guillen was traded to Detroit at the end of the 2003 baseball season, the Tigers were 43-119 and in dire need of a turnaround. Just three years later, the team was 95-67 and playing in the



Facing page: Guillen hit a solo home run during the July 8 game against the Boston Red Sox. At right: Guillen chats it up with Red Sox player Coco Crisp at second base.

World Series, with Guillen an American League MVP candidate.

“As soon as I came here, I knew we would get better. And now, everybody wants to play here because they know we’ve got a good team, a good ballpark and it’s great here,” says Guillen, 31, who lives, with his family, in Birmingham. “We didn’t win the World Series, but we’re ready to make the next step, because we have the experience.”

Thanks to a four-year, \$48-million contract extension he signed in March, the shortstop will be a Tiger until 2011, a move that gives Guillen a better chance to end his career with the team, which he says he’d like to do.

“In this game you never know where you’re going to finish, but I love Detroit,” he says. “I love this organization. We have a great owner who likes to win, a great front office and great fans. They love sports here; they love baseball. It’s tradition – everybody follows the Tigers.”

## BOTH SIDES OF HOME

The extension also means at least four more years in Birmingham, where Guillen lives during baseball season with his wife, Amelia, and their sons, Alfonso, 7, and Isaac, 4. “I picked Birmingham because it’s one of the best areas in Michigan,” Guillen says. “The town is very nice, the restaurants are nice – and it’s close to Somerset mall,” he notes (yes, even Carlos Guillen has a weakness for shopping).

In the off-season, the Guillens reside in Aragua, Venezuela. But Guillen is planning for his family to extend their time in Birmingham this year, so his sons can spend more time in their Birmingham schools. While in Venezuela, Alfonso and Isaac attend an international, English-speaking school; in between living in Venezuela and Birmingham, they have a tutor.

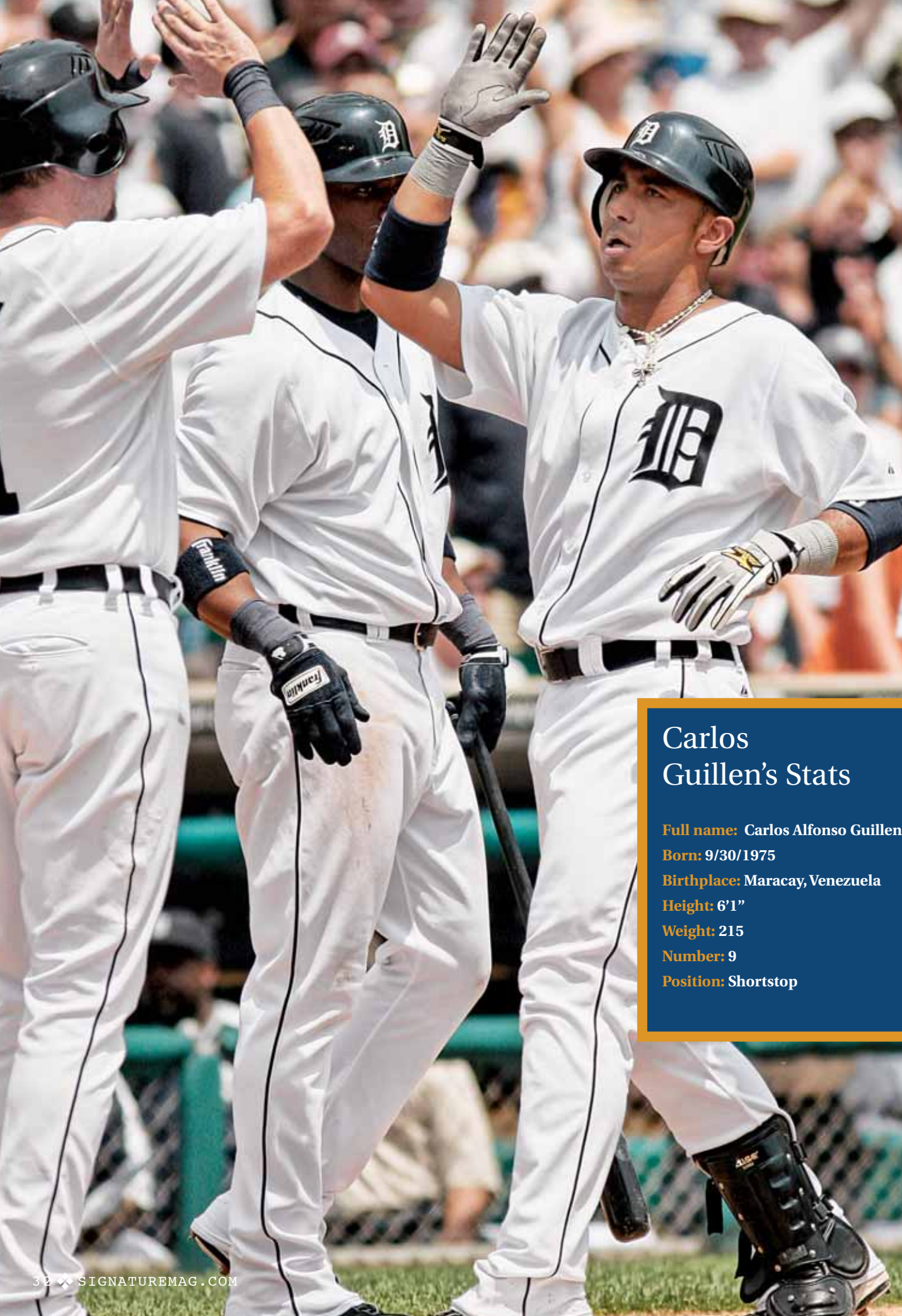
Guillen’s hometown of Maracay is about an hour from Caracas, with a population of 800,000, and according to Guillen, it’s very different from metro Detroit. “You see more people on the street, while here, you see more people

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– Carlos Guillen





## Carlos Guillen's Stats

**Full name:** Carlos Alfonso Guillen

**Born:** 9/30/1975

**Birthplace:** Maracay, Venezuela

**Height:** 6'1"

**Weight:** 215

**Number:** 9

**Position:** Shortstop

at work,” he explains. “We have shorter work hours there, so you have more time to spend with your family.” Limited time with family is a gripe of Guillen’s – he cites “not much time off” as the culprit.

Married for 10 years, Guillen and his wife were childhood sweethearts who grew up in the same building. He says it’s comforting to have a partner who was with him before his name – and income – exploded. “Every player, when [you] meet girls, [you] don’t know if they want you because you’re nice or because you’re a baseball player,” he says. “You don’t realize the difference, so I’m glad. I’ve known [Amelia] for a long time.”

### BORN TO PLAY BALL

The 6-foot-1-inch, 215-pound switch-hitter started playing baseball when he was 4 years old, and first came to the United States in 1994, as a free agent for the Houston Astros. It was then that Guillen says he knew he was good enough to make it. “I compared myself with the other players and felt I had a good chance to play in the big leagues someday,” he says. “I hurt myself almost every year in the minor leagues and I tried to keep my head up and work hard every day and tried to get better. And I did it.”

Guillen made his Major League Baseball debut in 1998 with the Seattle Mariners. Following the path of a prestigious line of Venezuelan shortstops, including Ozzie Guillen and Chico Carrasquel, Guillen names Dave Concepción, shortstop for the Cincinnati Reds, as his favorite. “We came from the same town [Maracay],” he says.

Although he’s best known as a shortstop, Guillen says he doesn’t mind playing where he’s needed. “I’ve played almost every position,” he notes. “I’m not afraid of any position. It makes you a better player if you can play everywhere.”

Of course, that includes being able to step up to the plate – which Guillen certainly has no problem doing. In 2006, he finished eighth in the



*Guillen enjoys the grounds at Cranbrook on a rare day off.*

American League with a .400 on-base percentage, and tied for ninth with 41 doubles.

“He’s a guy I like to watch,” says Tigers centerfielder Curtis Granderson. “Watching him hit, especially from the left side, seeing how he takes pitches and how he goes to both sides of the field. He’s doing something right.”

Guillen had a shoulder injury earlier this year that kept him out of a few games, one of many injuries he’s had throughout in his career. But as Tigers manager Jim Leyland will attest, “He’s a tough kid. He loves to play and he does it very well.”

“When you play every day, you expect to get hurt,” Guillen says. “You have to learn how to play sore. You’re never going to say, ‘I feel 100% today.’”

Guillen says Jim Leyland is probably the Tiger who makes him laugh the most. He considers rightfielder Magglio Ordoñez and shortstop Omar Infante – “the Venezuelan guys” – as his closest friends on the team.

“He’s a really great person, a really humble guy,” says Ordoñez, whose locker is next to Guillen’s. “He treats people the same and he never changes.”