

**2015 NATIONAL BASEBALL ARBITRATION COMPETITION**

**Jenrry Mejia v. New York Mets**

Submission on Behalf of the New York Mets

Midpoint: \$2.6M

*Submission by Team 32*

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## SOURCE NOTES

Tables contained in this brief were compiled using data available through the following sources:

- Table 1: “Jenrry Mejia Career Stats”, MLB: [http://newyork.mets.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player\\_id=516769](http://newyork.mets.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=516769) and “League Year-By-Year Pitching--Averages”, Baseball-Reference: <http://www.baseball-reference.com/leagues/MLB/pitch.shtml>.
- Table 2: “2014 Pitching Stats: Pitching Role”, Baseball-Reference: <http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/split.cgi?id=mejiaje01&year=2014&t=p>.
- Table 3: “Sortable Player Stats: Saves”, MLB: <http://mlb.mlb.com/stats/sortable.jsp>.
- Table 4: “2014 Pitching Stats: Game Outcome for Pitcher”, Baseball-Reference: <http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/split.cgi?id=mejiaje01&year=2014&t=p>.
- Table 5: Jenrry Mejia Statistics and History, Baseball-Reference: <http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/m/mejiaje01.shtml>.
- Table 6: “Jenrry Mejia: Injury History”, Baseball Prospectus: <http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=56089>.
- Table 7: “Drew Storen”, FanGraphs: <http://www.fangraphs.com/statss.aspx?playerid=6983&position=P>.
- Table 8: “Mark Melancon”, FanGraphs: <http://www.fangraphs.com/statss.aspx?playerid=4264&position=P>.
- Table 9: “Neftali Feliz”, FanGraphs: <http://www.fangraphs.com/statss.aspx?playerid=18&position=P>.

## **1. INTRODUCTION AND REQUEST FOR HEARING DECISION**

Jenrry Mejia (“**Mejia**”) is a right-handed pitcher with the New York Mets (the “**Club**” or “**Mets**”). Over his five year career spanning 2010-2014, Mejia has accumulated 2.140 years of service time. Mejia did not pitch in the MLB in 2011 as a result of ligament tear in his throwing elbow that required Tommy John surgery.<sup>1</sup> Over Mejia’s five MLB seasons, he has appeared in a total of 106 games, including 18 as a starting pitcher.

In accordance with ARTICLE VI.E.(1)(b) of the MLB Collective Bargaining Agreement, Mejia filed for salary arbitration after the 2014 season under the ‘Super Two’ provision.<sup>2</sup> As a ‘Super Two’ player, Mejia is arbitration eligible for the first time in his career.

The Club’s position is that Mejia should be compensated \$2.3M for the 2015 season, which is below the midpoint of \$2.6M. While the Club appreciates Mejia’s performance as a closer in 2014, a number of concerns must be accounted for in his salary award. These include: (1) Mejia’s ineffectiveness as a starting pitcher; (2) Mejia’s limited time in the closer role; and (3) Mejia’s history of frequent and significant injury.

## **2. QUALITY OF PLAYER’S CONTRIBUTIONS DURING PAST SEASON**

Mejia began the 2014 season as the fifth starter in the Mets rotation, starting seven games in the first six weeks of the 2014 MLB season.<sup>3</sup> In those seven starts, Mejia produced an ERA of 5.06 and a WHIP of 1.58. As demonstrated in Table 1, Mejia’s core statistics as a starting pitcher were well below the MLB averages for 2014. Furthermore, Mejia ranked worst or tied for worst in a number of key statistics as compared to the Mets’ other starting pitchers in 2014. Mejia’s

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<sup>1</sup> “Jenrry Mejia Has Ligament Tear, Will Miss Rest Of 2011 Season”, SB Nation (May 2, 2011): <http://www.sbnation.com/2011/5/2/2149822/jenrry-mejia-injury-elbow-mets>.

<sup>2</sup> MLB Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2012-2016 Basic Agreement, Article VI, Part E, Section 1(b).

<sup>3</sup> Mike Puma. “Mejia Mets’ fifth starter, for now”, NY Post (March 29, 2014): <http://nypost.com/2014/03/29/mejia-mets-fifth-starter-for-now/>.

ERA and WHIP as a starter were poor both in comparison to his teammates and to the league more generally.

<b>TABLE 1 – MEJIA’S PERFORMANCE AS A STARTING PITCHER<sup>4</sup></b>				
	<b>ERA</b>	<b>WHIP</b>	<b>BB/9</b>	<b>K/9</b>
<b>Platform (2014)</b>	5.06	1.58	4.82	9.16
MLB Avg. (2014)	3.74	1.28	2.90	7.70
Team Ranks (of 9)	Worst	Worst	Tied for Worst	3 <sup>rd</sup> Best

As a result of his poor performance as a starting pitcher, Mejia lost his position in the starting rotation and was relegated to the bullpen, where he would serve as a reliever for the remainder of the season. Fortunately for both Mejia and the Club, a number of Mejia’s statistical indicators improved after he moved to the bullpen. His ERA, WHIP and BB/9 all improved. Mejia eventually took over the role of closer for the Mets, where he delivered 28 saves in 31 opportunities. Following this move, Mejia’s ERA dropped from 5.06 to 2.72.

<b>TABLE 2 - MEJIA’S PERFORMANCE IN STARTS V. IN RELIEF (2014)</b>						
<b>Platform (2014)</b>	<b>IP</b>	<b>ERA</b>	<b>WHIP</b>	<b>BB/9</b>	<b>K/9</b>	<b>BA</b>
Starting	37.1	5.06	1.58	4.82	9.16	.265
In Relief	56.1	2.72	1.42	3.36	9.59	.265

While Mejia improved in moving to the bullpen, it is important to put his performance into context. Table 3 compares Mejia’s performance with the MLB’s top 30 closers in 2014 (as ranked by saves). Mejia’s core statistics, Saves and ERA, put him in the middle of the pack when compared to the MLB’s best in 2014. Mejia was not at the top of the MLB in any statistical category, but delivered a solid amount of saves in relation to opportunities (28 of 31), and did so with a respectable ERA below 3.0.

<b>TABLE 3 – MEJIA COMPARED TO TOP 30 MLB CLOSERS</b>						
<b>Platform (2014)</b>	<b>SV</b>	<b>ERA</b>	<b>WHIP</b>	<b>BB/9</b>	<b>K/9</b>	<b>BA</b>
Mejia	28	2.72	1.42	3.90	9.59	.265
Rank	19 <sup>th</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup>	29 <sup>th</sup>	27 <sup>th</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup>	T-30 <sup>th</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Note: Team rank includes all pitchers that started at least one game for the Mets in 2014 and only include Mejia’s statistics as a starting pitcher.

Although Mejia improved after he moved to the bullpen, the Club remains concerned with some of the numbers underlying his performance and in the way he is closing out games. Mejia allowed a higher rate of walks and hits than almost any other regular MLB closer, which is reflected in his extremely poor WHIP, BB/9 and BA. With a high WHIP of 1.42 in relief, Mejia is simply allowing too many baserunners. In other words, Mejia made 28 saves despite allowing a lot of baserunners. While Mejia was able to compensate for this with a strong number of strikeouts, there is concern moving forward that this type of pitching is not sustainable. If Mejia fails to maintain this amount of strikeouts moving forward, his ability to close out games will be at risk.

<b>TABLE 4 - MEJIA'S PERFORMANCE IN SAVE AND NON-SAVE SITUATIONS</b>					
<b>2014</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>IP</b>	<b>ERA</b>	<b>WHIP</b>	<b>BA</b>
Save Situations	33	33.1	2.97	1.50	.278
Non-Save Situations	23	23.0	2.35	1.30	.244

Mejia's statistical production as a reliever in 2014 was inflated by his performance in non-save situations, where his ERA was 25% better. Mejia's best pitching in 2014 actually came when he pitched from the bullpen, in non-save situations. Whether Mejia will ultimately become a full time, permanent closer in the MLB remains to be seen. The Mets recognize that Mejia is a good relief pitcher, but the evidence is that he has shown a limited capability to deliver in the role of closer when called upon to do so. His value must be determined accordingly.

### **3. LENGTH AND CONSISTENCY OF CAREER CONTRIBUTIONS**

In his first four pro seasons (2010-2013), Mejia made only 43 total appearances on the mound, 11 of which came as a starting pitcher. Following a promising rookie season in 2010, the Club expected Mejia to continue developing and to eventually take a spot in the starting rotation. Unfortunately, Mejia missed the entire 2011 season and part of the 2012 due to a severe injury to

his throwing elbow that required Tommy John surgery. This hurt Mejia's short term development and raises legitimate concerns for his short and long term durability.

<b>TABLE 5 - MEJIA'S CAREER MLB PERFORMANCE (STARTING AND RELIEF)</b>							
<b>Season</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>GS</b>	<b>IP</b>	<b>SV</b>	<b>WHIP</b>	<b>ERA</b>	<b>BB/9</b>
2010	33	3	39.0	0	1.69	4.62	4.6
2011	<i>Injury to Throwing Elbow</i>						
2012	5	3	16.0	0	1.81	5.62	5.1
2013	5	5	27.3	0	1.17	2.30	1.3
2014	63	7	93.7	28	1.48	3.65	3.9

After missing time again in 2013 due to injury in his right elbow, Mejia returned in July to pitch his personal best in terms of WHIP, ERA and BB/9. Unfortunately, his performance was limited to just five starts as Mejia's right elbow would again require surgery, which ended his season. Although Mejia was on track to begin the 2014 season on the starting rotation for the Club, his performance as a starter demonstrated a notable regression from the prior season. Even though Mejia improved with a move to the bullpen, he failed to continue the strong performance he posted in 2013 prior to the elbow injury.

Unfortunately for Mejia, and equally for the Club, injuries have significantly limited the amount of pitching that Mejia has done in his career. This was particularly evident over the course of the 2012 and 2013 seasons, in which Mejia was limited to only five appearances in each. Mejia's development as a pitcher has certainly been slowed by the amount of time spent on the disabled list. As a result, Mejia has not demonstrated to the Club that he is capable of pitching at a consistent level either for an entire season, or for consecutive seasons. Equally, there has not been a demonstrable trend of season to season improvement. While Mejia pitched more innings in 2014 than at any other time in his career, the quality of his pitching regressed compared to his 2013 performance and he can no longer be viewed as a potential starting pitcher.

#### 4. EXISTENCE OF PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DEFECTS

Serious and frequent injuries have prevented Mejia from making regular appearances in each of his first five MLB seasons. The Club's concern lies not only with the frequency of Mejia's injuries, but with the severity.

<b>TABLE 6 – MEJIA'S INJURY HISTORY</b>		
<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Time Missed</b>	<b>Injury</b>
August 2014	-	Hernia (surgery Oct 2014)
August 2014	3 games	Low back spasms
August 2014	2 games	Lower leg strain
June 2014	2 games	Low back tightness
April 2014	4 games	Finger blister
August 2013	41 games	Bone chips (right elbow)
March 2013	98 games	Right elbow inflammation
April 2012	52 games	Recovery from Tommy John surgery
April 2011	118 games	Torn ligament (right elbow); Tommy John surgery
September 2010	16 games	Upper back strain
<b>Total</b>		<b>336 games (2010-2014)</b>

#### Presence of a Physical Defect: Right (Throwing) Elbow

Mejia is only 25 years old, but has already dealt with a number of severe elbow injuries in his throwing arm. The pattern began in April 2011 when Mejia was diagnosed with a torn ligament in his right elbow that would require Tommy John surgery. Recovery from the surgery cost Mejia the entire 2011 season, and almost half of the 2012 season. Following his rookie season in 2010, Mejia was limited to a total of five appearances over the next two seasons as a result of injury to his throwing elbow.

Mejia's right elbow failed again in 2013. In March, just prior to the start of the 2013 season, Mejia suffered from right elbow inflammation that took him out of the lineup for 98 games. Mejia returned in July to make five appearances, only to suffer another injury to his right elbow. In August of 2013 Mejia was diagnosed with bone chips in his right elbow, which required surgery,

and forced Mejia to miss an additional 41 games, ending his 2013 season. Over the course of the 2011, 2012 and 2013 seasons, Mejia's right elbow caused him to miss a combined 309 games.

#### Consistent Injury Problems over Career

Mejia's history of injuries has not been limited to his right elbow. In 2010, his rookie season, Mejia suffered from shoulder and back strains that took him out of the lineup on two separate occasions. In his platform season, 2014, Mejia suffered from four separate injuries that took him out of the lineup for a combined 11 games. And at the conclusion of the 2014 season Mejia underwent surgery for a hernia.

The extensive time missed during his initial development years has certainly affected Mejia's growth as a pitcher. At the conclusion of his fifth season in the MLB (2014), Mejia accumulated just 106 appearances in the MLB. This, in comparison to Drew Storen, for example, who pitched in 164 games over just three seasons. The Club is hopeful that Mejia will fully recover from his injuries, but the limitations that the injuries have placed on his development as a pitcher must be taken into consideration.

#### **5. COMPARATIVE BASEBALL SALARIES**

The comparable players outlined below demonstrate that pitchers are generally paid for consistency, longevity, and overall career performance. While platform performance is one part of the compensation equation, consistent performance over time is central to ascertaining a player's value.

**A. Drew Storen, RP, CL (WAS): 2012 Platform Season - \$2.5M Salary in 2013<sup>5</sup>**

<b>TABLE 7 – PLAYER COMPARISON: DREW STOREN</b>									
<b>Name:</b> Jenrry Mejia (2014)			<b>Position:</b> RP, CL			<b>Teams:</b> NY Mets			
<b>MLST:</b> 2.140	<b>G</b>	<b>ERA</b>	<b>SV</b>	<b>HLD</b>	<b>WHIP</b>	<b>BB/9</b>	<b>K/9</b>	<b>BA</b>	<b>WAR</b>
Platform	63	3.65	28	2	1.48	3.90	9.42	.265	0.2
Pre-Platform	43	4.04	0	2	1.54	3.61	6.23	.282	0.4
<b>Name:</b> Drew Storen (2012)			<b>Position:</b> RP, CL			<b>Teams:</b> Washington Nationals			
<b>MLST:</b> 2.140	<b>G</b>	<b>ERA</b>	<b>SV</b>	<b>HLD</b>	<b>WHIP</b>	<b>BB/9</b>	<b>K/9</b>	<b>BA</b>	<b>WAR</b>
Platform	37	2.37	4	10	0.99	2.40	7.1	.210	0.8
Pre-Platform	127	3.10	48	13	1.13	2.89	8.68	.215	2.0

Like Mejia, Drew Storen (“**Storen**”) qualified for salary arbitration under the ‘Super Two’ category. Following Storen’s 2012 platform season, he signed a one year contract with the Washington Nationals for \$2.5M, with incentives. Storen missed the first 89 games of his platform season as a result of an elbow injury. Although his platform season was limited due to injury, Storen made up for the missed time by showing considerable improvement in his pitching. In returning from the injury Storen’s ERA, WHIP and BB/9 all improved over his pre-platform averages. This is the type of career progression that Mejia has struggled to demonstrate in his time with the Mets. Unlike Storen, injuries have interrupted Mejia’s development and have prevented him from improving season after season.

At the same stage of their careers, Storen managed to best Mejia in career appearances (164 to 106), saves (52 to 28) and holds (23 to 4), and did so in nearly three fewer calendar years. Beyond besting Mejia in appearances, his pitching was better both in his platform season and over his career. Storen’s pre-platform and platform ERA were nearly a run better than those of Mejia. In addition, Storen gave up significantly fewer base-runners than Mejia (platform WHIP of 0.99 to 1.48), giving assurances as to the sustainability of his performance moving forward.

<sup>5</sup> \$2.5M base salary does not include performance incentives. See “Compensation Details”, Baseball Prospectus: <http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=59345>.

In his short career Storen demonstrated the consistency and reliability of a closer. Storen's quality pitching has improved season-over-season, and when returning from injury in his platform season that trend continued. Storen's 52 career saves provided a level of confidence in his use as a closer that Mejia has yet to achieve. While the Club is hopeful that Mejia will one day achieve the same quality and consistency that Storen has demonstrated, the evidence shows that he has yet to do so.

### B. Mark Melancon, RP, CL (PIT): 2013 Platform Season - \$2.95M Salary in 2014

TABLE 8 – PLAYER COMPARISON: MARK MELANCON									
Name: Jenrry Mejia (2014)			Position: RP, CL			Teams: NY Mets			
MLST	G	ERA	SV	HLD	WHIP	BB/9	K/9	BA	WAR
Platform	63	3.65	28	2	1.48	3.90	9.42	.265	0.2
Pre-Platform	43	4.04	0	2	1.54	3.61	6.23	.282	0.4
Name: Mark Melancon (2013)			Position: RP, CL			Teams: NYY, HOU, BOS, PIT			
MLST	G	ERA	SV	HLD	WHIP	BB/9	K/9	BA	WAR
Platform	72	1.39	16	26	0.96	1.01	8.87	.223	2.0
Pre-Platform	147	4.11	21	13	1.27	3.24	8.00	.238	0.6

Mark Melancon (“**Melancon**”) was an All-Star in his 2013 platform season, having accumulated 16 saves and an impressive 26 holds, placing him 4<sup>th</sup> in the NL.<sup>6</sup> Like Mejia, Melancon's position on the depth chart had not been completely solidified during his platform season. Although Mejia was more frequently relied upon to close games in his platform season, Melancon's underlying numbers during his platform season exceeded those of Mejia in almost every way. Melancon had an ERA that was substantially better than Mejia's (1.39 to 3.65) and did so with significantly less baserunners (WHIP 0.96 to 1.48). Melancon's value to his club in his platform season was significantly greater than Mejia's. According to FanGraphs, in his platform season, Melancon had a Wins Above Replacement (“**WAR**”) of 2.0, as compared to

<sup>6</sup> “Awards and Honors” & “Seasons in Top 25 of Major Categories”, MLB: [http://pittsburgh.pirates.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player\\_id=453343](http://pittsburgh.pirates.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=453343).

Mejia's 0.2.<sup>7</sup>

On top of the separation in their platform seasons, Melancon demonstrated consistency and reliability over his career that is lacking for Mejia. Melancon's 219 appearances up to the end of his platform season, compared to Mejia's 106, were evidence of his ability to perform consistently at the MLB level. Melancon's 37 career saves also exceeds the 28 saves Mejia has put up in his career, all of which came in 2014. A consistent performance over his career, combined with an All-Star platform season, earned Melancon a salary of \$2.95M in his first year of arbitration eligibility. Melancon's better career performance, and substantially better platform season are equally demonstrative of the large gap between the two pitchers. A difference that warrants a salary award for Mejia below the \$2.6M midpoint.

### C. Neftali Feliz, RP, CL (TEX): 2012 Platform Season - \$2.9M Salary in 2013

<b>TABLE 9 – PLAYER COMPARISON: NEFTALI FELIZ</b>									
<b>Name:</b> Jenrry Mejia (2014)			<b>Position:</b> RP, CL			<b>Teams:</b> NY Mets			
MLST 2.140	<b>G</b>	<b>ERA</b>	<b>SV</b>	<b>HLD</b>	<b>WHIP</b>	<b>BB/9</b>	<b>K/9</b>	<b>BA</b>	<b>WAR</b>
Platform	63	3.65	28	2	1.48	3.90	9.42	.265	0.2
Pre-Platform	43	4.04	0	2	1.54	3.61	6.23	.282	0.4
<b>Name:</b> Neftali Feliz (2012)			<b>Position:</b> RP, CL			<b>Teams:</b> Texas Rangers			
MLST 3.098	<b>G</b>	<b>ERA</b>	<b>SV</b>	<b>HLD</b>	<b>WHIP</b>	<b>BB/9</b>	<b>K/9</b>	<b>BA</b>	<b>WAR</b>
Platform	8	3.16	0	0	1.20	4.85	7.80	.187	1.4
Pre-Platform	154	2.55	74	12	0.95	3.10	9.07	.171	5.4

Similar to Mejia, Neftali Feliz ("**Feliz**") suffered from a severe injury that would require Tommy John surgery. Unfortunately for Feliz, this injury occurred in 2012 and he missed the majority of his platform season. Yet even with a disastrous platform season, Feliz signed a one year contract with the Texas Rangers for \$2.9M. As a result of Feliz's injury, Mejia's platform numbers in terms of games and saves were superior to those of Feliz.

<sup>7</sup> 'WAR' is a non-standardized statistic used to ascertain a player's relative value to his team, as measured in wins above a replacement player. Differences of a full point or more in WAR are sufficient to indicate a difference in value between players. Defined in "What is War?", FanGraphs: <http://www.fangraphs.com/library/misc/war/>.

However Feliz's \$2.9M salary is proof that a pitcher's value is demonstrated in the length and consistency of his contributions, and not simply as a result of an anomalous platform season. Over the course of the three seasons prior to his platform, Feliz demonstrated the characteristics of an elite MLB closer. Beyond the much higher number of career appearances that Feliz has made in comparison to Mejia, he's delivered three times more career saves (74 to 28), with a much better career ERA (2.67 to 3.84) and has done so with a substantially higher career WAR, 6.8 to Mejia's 0.6.<sup>8</sup> Feliz's 72 combined saves over the 2010 and 2011 seasons was tied for sixth best in the MLB over that period. Although Mejia performed adequately in a limited opportunity as closer, his career has not progressed at the same rate and does not have the same longevity or hallmark of season-to-season consistency. Feliz was compensated in the amount of \$2.9M for career contributions that, to this point in time, have drastically exceeded those of Mejia. As such, Mejia's salary award should be considerably less than Feliz's salary and below the \$2.6M midpoint.

## **6. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Whether by injury or by poor performance, Mejia has not been able to establish himself as a starting pitcher in the MLB, nor as a proven closer. Despite showing improvement during his platform season after moving to the bullpen, Mejia has yet to demonstrate an ability to be relied upon, night after night. Mejia's career high appearances of 63 in 2014 is certainly promising, but it represents an inconsistency over his career to date. A history of severe and frequent injury, particularly in his right elbow, has unquestionably hurt Mejia's development as a pitcher and has substantially limited his career production. The Club has high hopes that Mejia will continue to develop, but his position is far from solidified. His compensation should reflect this uncertainty.

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<sup>8</sup> As established by FanGraphs. See footnote 7 above for a definition of 'WAR'.