2013 National Baseball Arbitration Competition

Dexter Fowler v. Colorado Rockies
Submission on Behalf of the Colorado Rockies
Midpoint: $4.3 million
Submission by: Team 13
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I. Introduction and Request for Hearing

This brief analyzes the assets and contributions of outfielder Dexter Fowler (“Mr. Fowler”) to be reflected in his 2012 contract with the Colorado Rockies Baseball Club (the “Club” or the “Rockies”). The Major League Baseball (“MLB”) Collective Bargaining Agreement (“CBA”) between MLB Clubs and the MLB Players Association set the criteria to be considered in this arbitration hearing. Under the CBA Section VI, Part 10(a)-(b), the criteria to be considered in this arbitration hearing include: (1) the quality of the Player’s contribution to the Club during the past season, including, but not limited to, his overall performance, special qualities of leadership and public appeal; (2) the length and consistency of his career contribution; (3) the record of the Player’s past compensation; (4) comparative baseball salaries; (5) the existence of any physical or mental defects; and (6) the recent performance record of the Club, including but not limited to its League standing and attendance as an indication of public acceptance.

The arbitration panel shall give particular attention, for comparative salary purposes, to the contracts of Players with Major League service not exceeding one annual service group above the Player’s annual service group. Evidence of the following shall not be admissible: (1) the financial position of the Player and the Club; (2) press comments or similar materials bearing on the performance of either the Player or the Club, except that recognized annual Player awards for playing excellence shall not be excluded; (3) offers made by either the Player or the Club prior to arbitration; (4) the cost to the parties of their representatives; and (5) salaries in other sports or occupations.

Mr. Fowler has reached 3.168 years of MLB service entitling him to file for second-year

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2 Id. at § 12(a)
3 Id.
4 Id. at § 12(b)
arbitration. Evidence of his past performance and future potential presented in this brief and in oral argument demonstrate that Mr. Fowler is entitled to a salary below the $4,300,000 million midpoint between the Club and Mr. Fowler’s final offers. The Rockies respectfully request that the arbitration panel find that Mr. Fowler is entitled to a 2013 salary arbitration award of $4,000,000.

II. Quality of the Player’s Contribution During the Past Season

In his platform season, Mr. Fowler arguably had his best season as a professional while playing Centerfield for the Colorado Rockies. He appeared in 131 games, starting in 116. In 454 at-bats, Fowler hit .300 with 13 home runs, 18 doubles, 11 triples, and 128 strikeouts. The high strikeouts are concerning given that they coincide with a lack of power numbers. Mr. Fowler struck out in a staggering 28% of his 2012 at-bats.

Mr. Fowler also greatly benefited from playing his home games in hitter friendly Coors Field. In 2012, Fowler was a different hitter at home than he was on the road. At home, Fowler hit .332 in 244 at-bats, with ten home runs, 51 runs scored, and 39 runs batted in (“RBI”). On the road, Fowler only managed to hit .262 in 210 at-bats, with three home runs, 21 runs scored, and 14 RBI. Further, his on-base plus slugging (“OPS”) was .984 at home and only .720 on the road. These significant differences in home and away splits illustrate that Mr. Fowler struggled in 2012 when playing outside of Coors Field. In fact, one of Fowler’s only consistent statistics between home and away games was strikeouts. Fowler struck out 61 times at home and 67 on the road. This suggests that Mr. Fowler’s 2012 overall numbers were heavily inflated due to playing in one of MLB’s best hitters’ parks.

6 Id.
8 Id.
9 Id.
III. Length and Consistency of Career Contributions

Dexter Fowler’s career statistics show that he has been remarkably consistent throughout his career. Fowler is a career .271 hitter with 28 home runs, 305 runs scored, and 168 RBI.\textsuperscript{10} Fowler has seen MLB action in five seasons, but has only substantially contributed in four, as he appeared in 13 games his rookie year.\textsuperscript{11} In Fowler’s four substantial seasons in the big leagues, he amassed 1807 at-bats, but never had more than 481 at-bats in a single season.\textsuperscript{12} Also, Fowler has 478 strikeouts in those 1807 at-bats for a 27% K/AB percentage over his career.\textsuperscript{13} The disparity in Fowler’s home and away numbers can be extrapolated throughout his career as well. Over the course of Fowler’s career at home, he is a .295 hitter with 20 home runs, 30 triples, 182 runs scored, and 120 RBI.\textsuperscript{14} Throughout his career on the road, Fowler has managed to hit just .248 with eight home runs, 20 triples, 123 runs scored, and 48 RBI.\textsuperscript{15} The stark difference in numbers directly correlates to the advantage of playing home games at the hitter friendly Coors Field, as he has 920 at-bats at Coors Field and 913 at-bats at road parks.\textsuperscript{16}

In Fowler’s 2009 rookie season, he came into the league showing great promise. He played in 135 games, hitting .266 with four home runs, 73 runs scored, and 34 RBI.\textsuperscript{17} Fowler also impressed on the base paths, stealing 27 bases.\textsuperscript{18} However, the strikeout numbers were still high as a rookie; he had 116 strikeouts in 433 at-bats, for a 27% K/AB percentage.\textsuperscript{19} He hit .294 at Coors Field this season, while only hitting .236 on the road.\textsuperscript{20} He also struggled in the outfield

\begin{itemize}
  \item [\textsuperscript{10}] http://www.fangraphs.com/statss.aspx?playerid=4062&position=OF
  \item [\textsuperscript{11}] Id.
  \item [\textsuperscript{12}] Id.
  \item [\textsuperscript{13}] Id.
  \item [\textsuperscript{14}] http://www.fangraphs.com/statsplits.aspx?playerid=4062&position=OF&season=2012
  \item [\textsuperscript{15}] Id.
  \item [\textsuperscript{16}] Id.
  \item [\textsuperscript{17}] http://www.fangraphs.com/statss.aspx?playerid=4062&position=OF
  \item [\textsuperscript{18}] Id.
  \item [\textsuperscript{19}] Id.
\end{itemize}
and committed the third most errors for a Center Fielder in the National League in 2009.\(^{21}\) Despite these negatives, Fowler finished eighth in the 2009 Rookie of the Year voting.\(^{22}\) Optimism about Fowler’s potential was high. The thought was that if he could continue to improve and cut down on the strikeout numbers, he could develop into one of MLB’s rising stars.

However, Mr. Fowler’s development into a star is still a work in progress. In 2010, he hit .260 with six home runs, 73 runs scored, and 36 RBI.\(^{23}\) While he cut his strikeouts down to 104, he also had 10 less walks than the previous season, a .020 lower OBP, and only managed to steal 13 bases.\(^{24}\) Fowler improved slightly in some areas of his game, but it was to the detriment of others. One bright spot for Mr. Fowler was that he led the National League in triples with 14.\(^{25}\) However, he had still not realized his full potential after the 2010 season.

Mr. Fowler remained fairly consistent in the 2011 season. While he played in a career low 125 games, he had a career high 481 at-bats.\(^{26}\) Fowler hit .266 with five home runs, 84 runs scored, and 45 RBI.\(^{27}\) His strikeouts went up with his at-bats, and he had 130 strikeouts for a 27% K/AB percentage.\(^{28}\) Mr. Fowler continued to struggle on the bases and in the outfield. In 2011, Fowler’s stolen bases dropped to 12, and he was caught stealing nine times.\(^{29}\) Fowler also committed eight errors, which was second most among National League Center Fielders and third most among all National League Outfielders.\(^{30}\) Through the 2011 season, Mr. Fowler was consistent offensively and defensively. He remained a young player with high potential and great

\(^{22}\) Id.
\(^{24}\) Id.
\(^{26}\) Id.
\(^{28}\) Id.
\(^{29}\) Id.

Id.
speed, but needed to take the next step to maximize his talent.

As was previously discussed, 2012 was a step in the right direction for Mr. Fowler. He posted career highs in average, home runs, RBI, OBP, and SLG. However, he also had a career high K/AB percentage and his six errors were the most by any National League Center Fielder.\textsuperscript{31} He again failed to utilize his speed on the bases with only 12 steals.\textsuperscript{32}

Consistency is generally regarded as a positive in athletics and on some level it is true. Whether consistently good or bad, consistency over a period of time gives you an idea of who the player is and what he can develop into. However consistency should not be an absolute deciding factor of who a player is. Despite Mr. Fowler’s consistently mediocre numbers over the past four seasons, the potential for Fowler to become a star remains. Fowler has shown he is capable of hitting for a high average, stealing a high number of bases, creating extra base hits with his speed, and playing Center Field with the best in the League. While Mr. Fowler’s overall stats have been consistent, he has not had a season where everything has come together, maximizing his potential. The Club wants to see Fowler continue to develop and become the star that both Fowler and the Club desires him to be.

IV. Past Player Contributions

Mr. Fowler earned the league minimum from 2009 to 2011 as a Colorado Rocky. 2012 was the first year Fowler was arbitration eligible, and he received a salary of $2,350,000.\textsuperscript{33} The Club is offering Fowler $4,000,000 for the 2013 season: greater than an 85% increase in compensation from the 2012 season.

V. Comparative Player Salaries

Based on the salaries of statistically comparable second-time arbitration eligible Center

\textsuperscript{31} Id.
\textsuperscript{32} http://www.fangraphs.com/statss.aspx?playeid=4062&position=OF
\textsuperscript{33} http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/f/fowlede01.shtml
Fielders, the Club’s offer of $4,000,000 accurately reflects his expected value and contribution to the Rockies.

a. **Michael Bourn ($4,400,000 in 2011)**

Center Fielder Michael Bourn had a 2010 platform season with the Houston Astros that provides evidence that the Club’s $4.00 million offer to Fowler is fair. Both Bourn and Fowler are speedy Center Fielders entering arbitration for the second time after three years of MLB service time. In Bourn’s platform season, he was an All-Star and Gold Glove award winner, yet his contract immediately following was only $100,000 more than Mr. Fowler’s midpoint value.\(^{34}\)

After being traded to the Houston Astros before the 2008 season, Bourn proceeded to become one of the best young talents in the MLB. In 2008, Bourn played in 138 games at Center Field for the Astros.\(^{35}\) In 467 at-bats, he hit .229 with five home runs, ten doubles, 57 runs scored, and 29 RBI.\(^{36}\) Despite the sub-par numbers in 2008, Bourn established himself as one of MLB’s prominent base stealers. His 41 stolen bases in 2008 were fourth best in the National League.\(^{37}\)

2009 was the season that Bourn became not only one of the League’s best base stealers, but also one of the League’s best Center Fielders. He played in 157 games for the Astros, 14 more than Fowler has ever played in during his career.\(^{38}\) Bourn had 606 at-bats, hitting .285 with three home runs, 27 doubles, 12 triples, 97 runs scored, and 35 RBI.\(^{39}\) He also had 61 stolen bases, which led the National League.\(^{40}\) In addition to these impressive offensive numbers, he


\(^{36}\) Id.


\(^{39}\) Id.

also excelled defensively and won his first Gold Glove award.\textsuperscript{41} His 371 putouts in 2009 ranked second in the National League and third in MLB.\textsuperscript{42} By the end of the 2009 season, Bourn’s career had blossomed, and he had become a complete player. Following the 2009 season, Bourn entered his first arbitration receiving an award of $2,400,000 reflecting his great season, but also taking into account that it was the first season he had performed at that level.\textsuperscript{43}

Bourn’s offensive statistics dropped slightly in 2010, but he still managed to play at a high level. He played in 141 games in 2010, was an All-Star, and won his second consecutive Gold Glove award.\textsuperscript{44} He hit .265 in 535 at-bats with 25 doubles, 84 runs scored, and 38 RBI.\textsuperscript{45} Once again, Bourn led the National League in stolen bases with 52.\textsuperscript{46} After the 2010 season, Bourn had established that he could consistently perform at a high level. For this reason, he received a $4,400,000 salary for the 2011 season, $100,000 more than the midpoint in Mr. Fowler’s case.

Mr. Fowler’s career power numbers are marginally better than Bourn’s through Bourn’s 2010 season. However, a large factor to consider is that Fowler has enjoyed the advantage of playing half of his games at Coors Field. Additionally, these two players are speedy leadoff hitters whose primary contributions to their respective ball clubs involve getting on base, utilizing their speed to advance and ultimately score, and play defense. Bourn’s additional 109 stolen bases, two Gold Glove awards, and being voted an All-Star in his 2010 platform season warrant at least an additional $100,001 for Bourn. Taking that into account, it is apparent that Mr. Fowler’s value is on the lower side of the midpoint, and the Club’s offer of $4,000,000 is fair.

\textsuperscript{41} Id.
\textsuperscript{42} Id.
\textsuperscript{43} Id.
\textsuperscript{44} Id.
\textsuperscript{45} \url{http://www.fangraphs.com/statss.aspx?playerid=6387&position=OF}
\textsuperscript{46} \url{http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/b/bournmi01.shtml}
b. B.J. Upton ($4,825,000 in 2011)

Tampa Bay Ray’s Center Fielder, B.J. Upton, provides another valuable comparison. While Upton received a slightly higher salary than sought by Fowler, the difference in salaries was deserved. Upton’s first year of arbitration yielded a $3,000,000 contract, so the starting point for his second year of arbitration was set higher.\(^{47}\) Upton’s $4,825,000 contract in 2011 was only a 61% raise over his 2010 contract.\(^{48}\) The Colorado Rockies are offering Dexter Fowler an 85% raise in 2013.

Both Upton and Fowler are leadoff hitting Center Fielders with great speed. However, the style of Upton and Fowler’s game is different. Fowler gets on base and has relatively low power numbers considering that he plays at Coors Field. Upton hit for power, but sacrificed his batting average. 2007 was arguably Upton’s best season when he hit .300 with 24 home runs, 86 runs scored, 82 RBI, 25 doubles, and 22 stolen bases.\(^{49}\) The impressive thing about Upton’s power numbers is that Tropicana Field was his home field. While Coors Field is MLB’s most hitter friendly park, Tropicana Field is tied for 23\(^{rd}\).\(^{50}\)

Upton’s platform year of 2010 was a down year, which explains why he only received a 61% increase in salary. In 154 games, Upton hit .237 with 18 home runs, 38 doubles, 89 runs scored, and 62 RBI.\(^{51}\) Looking solely at Upton’s average, it appears 2010 was a horrible season. However, he still managed a .322 OBP, slugged .424, and stole 42 bases.\(^{52}\) Additionally, Upton was a primary contributor to the Rays winning the American League East division and advancing to the postseason for just the second time in their history.\(^{53}\) Upton also provided value to the

\(^{47}\) http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/u/uptonbj01.shtml
\(^{48}\) Id.
\(^{50}\) http://espn.go.com/mlb/stats/parkfactor
\(^{52}\) Id.
Rays organization with his versatility. Including DH, Upton had played seven different positions for the Rays. Upton has an exceptionally strong arm and excels in throwing out guys from Center Field. In 2007, Upton was tied for second in the American League with 11 assists from Center Field. In 2008, he was first with 16.

The higher starting salary point produced a higher salary in 2011 for Upton than the contract offered to Mr. Fowler. Upton’s 2010 salary was $650,000 greater than Fowler’s 2012 salary. In addition to the higher starting point, Upton’s power numbers in a pitcher friendly park, the facts that the Rays won their division in his platform year, his 103 additional stolen bases, defensive prowess, and versatility justified Upton’s 2011 salary that was $525,000 greater than Mr. Fowler’s midpoint.

54 http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/u/uptonbj01.shtml
55 Id.
56 Id.
VI. Existence of Physical or Mental Defects

Dexter Fowler has suffered a variety of minor injuries throughout his career, but no injuries that are cause for concern moving forward. In 2009, Fowler was placed on the 15-day Disabled List for a deep bone bruise after he fouled a fastball off of his right knee.\(^{57}\) In 2012, Fowler injured his ankle on dugout step in Miami. Three months later, he re-injured the ankle when he rolled it running to second base.\(^{58}\) He was forced to miss a couple games, but was never placed on the disabled list.

VII. Recent Performance of the Club

The Colorado Rockies recent performance has left much to be desired. Most recently in 2012, the Club finished 64-98 and came in fifth in the National League West division.\(^{59}\) The Rockies allowed 890 runs while only scoring 758 runs themselves.\(^{60}\) Due to playing home games at Coors Field, the Rockies offensive statistics were great. They finished third in the National league in runs scored and first in batting average.\(^{61}\) However, the Rockies’ problem was that they could not keep other teams from scoring at Coors Field. They finished last in the National League in ERA and second to last in fielding percentage.\(^{62}\) The combination of poor pitching, bad fielding, and Coors Field doomed the Rockies from the start.

VIII. Conclusion

Dexter Fowler has been one of the most talented players in MLB throughout his career. However, Fowler has not yet realized his full potential. While Fowler’s 2012 platform season was a step in the right direction, it was only a step. He continued to struggle away from Coors

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\(^{58}\) http://espn.go.com/mlb/story/_/id/8295053/colorado-rockies-dexter-fowler-sprains-ankle
\(^{59}\) http://www.baseball-reference.com/teams/COL/2012.shtml
\(^{60}\) Id.
\(^{61}\) Id.
\(^{62}\) Id.
Field, play poor defensively, and his stolen base numbers have failed to return to their 2009 level. Additionally, Fowler strikes out in over a quarter of his at-bats and has maintained low power numbers despite playing home games at Coors Field. Mr. Fowler has all of the tools in the shed, and the Club is excited for Fowler to continue developing into the player that he can be. Based on the evidence outlined in this brief and in oral argument, the Club respectfully requests that this panel grant its arbitration request for a $4,000,000 salary for the 2013 season.