2013 National Baseball Arbitration Competition

**Ike Davis v. New York Mets**

*Submission on Behalf of New York Mets*

*Midpoint: $2.7 million*

*Submission by: Team 17*
# Table of Contents

I. Introduction and Request for Hearing Decision .................................................. 3
II. Quality of Mr. Davis’ Contributions During the Most Recent Season .......... 4
III. Length and Consistency of Mr. Davis’ Career Contributions ....................... 5
IV. Mr. Davis’ Past Compensation ................................................................. 6
V. Analysis of Comparable Salaries for Players Similar to Mr. Davis .......... 6
VI. Existence of Physical or Mental Defects ..................................................... 10
VII. Recent Performance of the New York Mets ............................................... 10
VIII. Summary and Conclusion ....................................................................... 11
IX. Appendix .................................................................................................... 12
I. INTRODUCTION AND REQUEST FOR HEARING DECISION

This brief analyzes the contributions and abilities of first baseman Ike Davis (the “Player” or “Davis”) for an arbitration hearing to determine his total compensation in a one-year contract with the New York Mets (the “Club” or the “Mets”). The Major League Baseball (“MLB”) Collective Bargaining Agreement (“CBA”) governs this arbitration hearing. According to CBA Article VI(E), Part 10(a)—(b), the relevant criteria for determining a salary value during arbitration include: (1) the quality of the Player’s contribution to his 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) comparable baseball salaries; (5) the existence of any physical or mental defects on the part of the player; 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.\(^1\) For any player with fewer than five years of relevant MLB service, such as Mr. Davis, the panel shall “give particular attention, for comparable salary purposes, to the contracts of Players with Major League service not exceeding one annual service group above the Player’s annual service group.”\(^2\)

Mr. Davis, who will soon turn 26 years old, has accumulated 2.168 years of MLB service, which entitles him to first-year arbitration as a “Super Two.”\(^3\) He has proven to be a valuable member of the Mets franchise, and has shown flashes of exceptional power and strong instincts. However, Mr. Davis’ inconsistent offensive production, particularly in home games

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2. *Id.*
3. *Id.* at Article VI(E), § 1(a), pp. 17-18.
and against left-handed pitchers, along with his injury history, establish that he is fairly entitled to a salary below the $2.7 million midpoint between his offer and the Club’s offer. The Mets respectfully request this panel find Mr. Davis entitled to a 2013 salary award of $2.4 million.

II. QUALITY OF MR. DAVIS’ CONTRIBUTIONS DURING THE MOST RECENT SEASON

During the past season, Mr. Davis showed power at the plate but lacked the ability to consistently put the ball in play. His batting average (“BA”) fell to .227, with a .308 on-base percentage (“OBP”) and a .462 slugging percentage (“SLG”); all were career lows, save Davis’ SLG, which was near his rookie .440 output. Though he finished fifth in the National League with 32 home runs, his total runs (66), total hits (118), and walks (61), were unexceptional figures given his 584 plate appearances. Davis struck out in 27 percent of his at-bats, 141 times total, which was 5th in the National League (the “NL”), and 2nd among NL first basemen. Mr. Davis recorded the lowest OBP of NL starting first baseman that played enough to qualify for the batting title (see Appendix, fig. 1), largely due to his poor .43 walk-to-strikeout ratio.

Mr. Davis’ markedly inferior 2012 performances in his home stadium, Citi Field, and against left-handed pitching, are of great concern to the Club. While, given Citi Field’s run factor ranking of 23rd in the league, a drop-off at home is to be expected, Mr. Davis posted a .284 difference in OBP + SLG (“OPS”) with .618 at home and .902 in road games, by far the largest split among qualifying NL first basemen (see Appendix, fig. 2). His struggles at Citi Field were mighty - he hit only 11 of his 32 home runs and struck out in 32% of his at-bats. Mr. Davis, a left-handed hitter, also struggled mightily against left-handed pitching, hitting only .174

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5 Id.
6 Id.
7 Id. This was despite garnering walks in 10 percent of his plate appearances.
9 Davis’ mlb.com player page, select “Splits”: http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=477195#gameType=%27R%27.
and posting a .560 OPS in 178 such plate appearances, a sample large enough to implicate structural problems in his approach versus such pitchers.\(^{10}\) However, given that Davis is still relatively young, the Club hesitates to draw any final conclusions from this limited data set. If replicated, such numbers would suggest that Mr. Davis may be, at best, a “platoon” player that must sit against left-handers rather than playing every day.

**III. LENGTH AND CONSISTENCY OF MR. DAVIS’ CAREER CONTRIBUTIONS**

Mr. Davis has been a part of the New York Mets franchise since the Club drafted him 18th in the 1st round of the 2008 Major League Baseball Amateur Draft. He played for around 1.5 seasons with various minor league affiliates of the Club from 2008-2010. Davis started his pro career with a stint at low-A ball that appears uncharacteristic in hindsight, going homerless in 239 plate appearances during the short season.\(^{11}\) He followed up with a much stronger and well-rounded 2009 season split between the Club’s A+ and AA affiliates that featured a combined 20 home runs, 71 runs batted-in, and a .906 OPS.\(^{12}\) Davis advanced to the AAA Buffalo Bisons to start the 2010 season, followed by an early leap to the majors on April 19\(^{th}\) of that year. He was immediately slotted in as the starting first baseman, hitting .264 with 19 home runs, 71 runs batted in, and 73 runs scored in 523 at-bats.\(^{13}\) This impressive debut landed Davis 7th in the National League Rookie of the Year voting and locked in his role as starting first baseman for the 2011 season. However, he soon found his hot sophomore start of 7 home runs, a .302 batting average, and .925 OPS in 129 at-bats curtailed by a season-ending injury.\(^{14}\)

Reviewing Davis’ record-to-date, one likely notes the decline in Davis’ performance in 2012 vis-à-vis his 2010 performance at home and against left-handed pitching. In 2010, Davis

\(^{10}\) See note 9, supra.

\(^{11}\) Davis’ minor league stats: http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/player.cgi?id=davis-002isa

\(^{12}\) Id.

\(^{13}\) Davis’ Baseball Reference page: http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/d/davisik02-bat.shtml

\(^{14}\) Id.
showed small OPS home/road splits (.812 to .770) and small OPS vs. left-handed pitching/right handed pitching splits (.805 to .787), suggesting that he was generally as effective in each situation.\textsuperscript{15} This was not so in his platform season as his home OPS plummeted to .618 and OPS versus left-handed pitching fell to an even worse .560 last and third-to-last among qualifying NL first basemen, respectively (see Appendix, figs. 1 & 2), barely edging out Garrett Jones, who platooned and made only 79 plate appearances against lefties on the season,\textsuperscript{16} and Carlos Lee, who is well into the decline phase of his career at age 36. Figure 2 shows the magnitude of Davis home/road split for 2012, by far the worst among qualifying NL first basemen.

\section*{IV. Mr. Davis’ Past Compensation}

During 2011 and 2012, Mr. Davis made slightly more than the league minimum salary: earning $432,000 for the 2011 season and $506,690 in the 2012 season.\textsuperscript{17}

\section*{V. Analysis of Comparable Salaries for Players Similar to Mr. Davis}

Davis’ performance in his first few years in the league - a solid rookie season followed by an injury-shortened sophomore effort and a lackluster third season - does not favor his salary request when compared to other recently arbitration-eligible first basemen with similar service levels. Though a dearth of first basemen have gone through salary arbitration since 2007, Davis’ career trajectory allows for a robust comparison with two first basemen that have been arbitration eligible and signed a contract outside of the process - Casey Kotchman in 2008, then with the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, and Adam LaRoche in 2007, then with the Atlanta Braves. His performance to date also tracks closely with that of Garrett Jones, a Super Two first baseman and outfielder who underwent an arbitration hearing in 2012.

\textsuperscript{15} mlb.com player page, select “Splits” for 2010 Regular Season: http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=477195#gameType=%27R%27
\textsuperscript{16} Jones’ mlb.com player page, select “Splits http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=434540#gameType=%27R%27
\textsuperscript{17} See note 13, supra.
A. Casey Kotchman

Kotchman became arbitration-eligible as a Super Two after the 2007 season as a 24-year-old first baseman with the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim. Like Davis, he was a first-round draft pick, going 13th in the 2001 Amateur Draft. First called up at age 21, Kotchman was with the big league club for pieces of the 2004-2006 seasons before spending most of the 2007 season with the Angels. His 2007 salary, $382,500, comes in below Davis’ 2012 platform salary of $506,690. Kotchman ultimately signed a one-year deal for $1.45 million for the 2008 season.

Kotchman’s statistics prior to becoming arbitration eligible, especially his platform season, show him to be a more complete offensive player with a far superior ability to put the ball in play, as well as a greater asset on the defensive side than Davis. Although Davis showed a knack for power, hitting more home runs (32 to 11) accruing more RBIs (90 to 66), Kotchman matched or outperformed Davis in nearly every other category of note. Kotchman hit .296 to Davis’ .227, recorded 13 more hits (131 to 118), hit 11 more doubles than Davis (37 to 26), and roughly matched him in runs scored (66 to 64). Kotchman accomplished this in roughly 75 fewer plate appearances than Davis. This was largely due to Kotchman’s plate discipline, drawing 53 walks to 43 strikeouts on the way to a .372 OBP, well in excess of Davis’ .308 figure. Despite Davis’ hitting nearly three times as many homeruns, Kotchman outslugged him on the season (.467, compared to .462 for Davis).

Davis does not make up for the difference in compensation with his glove. Davis played in roughly 1.5 times the number of games at first base as Kotchman, (330 to 210) but committed

18 Kotchman’s minor league stats page: http://www.baseball-reference.com/minors/player.cgi?id=kotchm001ca
20 Id.
22 Id.
23 Id.
three times as many errors (18 to 6).\textsuperscript{24} Further, Davis showed no discernible pattern in his errors – committing 3 catching errors, 8 fielding errors, and 7 throwing errors, an unusually high number for a position that rarely makes throwing assists.\textsuperscript{25}

Kotchman’s offensive performance, defensive consistency and displayed potential entering arbitration eligibility put him on par with Davis’ comparable performance period, making Davis’ request of more than double Kotchman’s compensation difficult to justify.

B. Adam LaRoche

Adam LaRoche was a first 26-year-old first baseman for the Atlanta Braves when he became arbitration eligible after his third season in the league, 2006 after 3.0 years of eligible service.\textsuperscript{26} Both Davis and LaRoche are young, power-hitting first basemen, with Davis accruing more service time due to his durability, playing in 15\% more games in his first three seasons than Davis.\textsuperscript{27} LaRoche’s case is unique in that his original team traded him after a $2.8 million team offer and $3.7 million player offer (a $3.25 million midpoint) were circulated prior to arbitration hearings.\textsuperscript{28} He ultimately signed a one-year, $3.2 million contract with his new team.\textsuperscript{29}

Mr. LaRoche outperformed Mr. Davis, in both averages and absolute terms, during their first three seasons. Mr. LaRoche hit the same number of home runs, 32, and collected the same number of runs batted in, 90, as did Mr. Davis in his platform season, but he substantially outperformed Mr. Davis in BA (.285 to .227), OPS (.915 to .771), and runs scored (89 to 66), all in 27 fewer plate appearances.\textsuperscript{30} Mr. LaRoche’s .561 SLG was an impressive 8th in the NL.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{25} http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/d/davisik02-field.shtml
\textsuperscript{27} Id.
\textsuperscript{28} “Pirates Settle with LaRoche, Grabow,” http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/wire?section=mlb&id=2752437
\textsuperscript{29} Id.
\textsuperscript{30} See note 26, supra
Mr. Laroche’s prior two seasons in Atlanta, in which he produced a combined 33 home runs, 123 runs batted in, and a .267 BA in 251 games, provided a stable base that suggested his powerhouse third season was not a fluke, but rather the steady progression of an improving player. Mr. Davis’ wildly disparate rookie and third-year efforts, in addition to the serious injury that cut short his second season, do not provide the same level of comfort to a team projecting future performance. Simply, Laroche’s consistency and durability show why Mr. Davis should not be awarded a contract similar to LaRoche’s 2007 deal.

C. Garrett Jones

Jones provides the best comparison to Mr. Davis as he starts most of his games at first base and very recently went through an arbitration hearing as a Super Two in the 2012 round. The Pirates countered Jones’ request of $2.5 million with an offer of $2.25 million, leaving the parties with a relatively small $250,000 gap. Nonetheless, Jones lost his arbitration hearing. Davis would need to merit compensation more than 20% higher than the $2.25 million figure for Jones to land on his preferred side of the $2.7 million midpoint. Jones made a brief 31-game trip to the majors in 2007 for the Minnesota Twins before becoming Super Two after playing 388 games for the Pittsburgh Pirates from 2009-2011. Like Davis, Jones had an impressive rookie season, batting .293, earning a .938 OPS and hitting 21 home runs in only 82 games and ultimately finishing 7th in 2009 NL Rookie of the Year voting. Jones followed this up in the

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31 LaRoche’s Baseball Reference page: http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/l/larocad01.shtml
32 Id.
36 Id.
next two seasons by splitting time between outfield and first base, accruing numbers that are highly similar to Davis’ third season while not sustaining any major injuries.

2010: BA .247, OPS .720, 21 HR, and 86 RBI in 478 PA

2011: BA .243, OPS .753, 16 HR, and 58 RBI in 515 PA

These numbers are instructive because they project Davis’ production if he fails to adjust to left-handed hitting and becomes a platoon player. Given recent performance, Davis’ compensation should fall closer to Jones’ $2.25 million award and below the $2.7 million midpoint.

VI. EXISTENCE OF PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DEFECTS

Mr. Davis has suffered two distinct yet equally concerning injuries during his short career with the Mets. On May 10 2011, Davis collided with franchise star David Wright while fielding a pop-up near the pitcher’s mound, suffering a deep bone bruise, sprained ankle, and entering a confounding healing period that ultimately caused him to miss the last 125 games of the season. Concerns that Davis might require a delicate and risky microfracture procedure were unfounded, but only after a protracted recovery process that left the Club in doubt of Mr. Davis’ healing capabilities. Before the start of his third season, Davis had a scare with Valley Fever, a little-understood ailment thought to have shortened the career of a similar young first baseman, Conor Jackson. These injuries, and their effect on his most beneficial offensive attribute, his power, call into serious question his ability to be an everyday starter and offensive cornerstone.

VII. RECENT PERFORMANCE OF THE NEW YORK METS

37 Id.
38 Id.
39 “Ike’s Ankle Not Improving; Surgery Possible” http://mlb.mlb.com/news/article.jsp?ymd=20110622&content_id=20874482&vkey=news_nym&c_id=nym
41 “Valley Fever Strikes Ike Davis; …Being Rested; Treated for Illness” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/03/valley-fever-strikes-mets-1b-ike-davis_n_1319096.html
The Mets’ performance over the last 5 seasons has been underwhelming and suggests a team trending in the wrong direction. After winning 89 games in 2008 and losing the wild card by one game, the Mets have registered 70, 79, 77, and 74 wins, respectively, for the 2009-2012 stretch. Team attendance has tracked this recent spate of poor performance. The 2008 and 2009 seasons saw large crowds that charted at 2nd (51,165) and 7th (38,941) in the League, as the team transitioned from Shea Stadium to Citi Field. The Club’s last three years in Citi Field have not been as kind, drawing the 12th, 14th, and 17th largest crowds in MLB, dipping as low as 28,035 fans per game in 2012. The NL East is a difficult division, with the up-and-coming Nationals, whose 98 wins were the most in baseball in 2012, and a 94-win Wild Card Braves team. In 2012, The Mets were 52-77 in games not started by Cy Young winner R.A. Dickey. The team’s sustained mediocrity stems from an inability to develop and retain young talent, with David Wright being the only current homegrown, all-star-caliber player on the team roster.

VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Mets are confident in their belief that Mr. Davis can be a fundamental part of building a winning team. However, his disappointing performance at Citi Field and inability to consistently reach base, while playing a position that generally is expected to deliver substantial offensive contributions, give the Club pause. Comparing Davis with other similar players, in and out of arbitration, shows his value to be far closer to the Club’s offer of $2.4 million than Davis’

44 Mets’ official site ball park comparison: http://newyork.mets.mlb.com/nym/ballpark/information/index.jsp?content=by_the_numbers
45 See Note 43, supra.
48 Mets’ official site team roster: http://mets.mlb.com/team/roster_active.jsp?c_id=nym
offer of $3.0 million, and we respectfully request a finding that Mr. Davis is entitled to a $2.4 million contract in the 2013 season.

IV. APPENDIX

Figure 1

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<th>Player</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>OPS v LHP</th>
<th>PA</th>
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<td>Paul Goldschmidt</td>
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Source: MLB.com Sortable Player Stats\(^49\)

Figure 2

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Source: MLB.com Sortable Player Stats\(^50\)


\(^50\) Id., derived from individual player pages and 2012 Home OPS and Road OPS Splits