Dexter Fowler v. Colorado Rockies

Submission on Behalf of the Colorado Rockies

Team 18
I. Introduction

The Colorado Rockies (“Rockies”), a Major League Baseball (“MLB”) team in the National League West Division (“NL West”), pursuant to Article VI, Section E, Part 10 (a) & (b) of the current MLB Collective Bargaining Agreement, submit a 2013 salary figure of four million ($4,000,000) for center fielder Dexter Fowler (“Fowler”). Fowler, who made his MLB debut on September 2, 2008, has accumulated 3.168 years of service time, and is therefore eligible for his second year of arbitration proceedings for which he has submitted a salary figure of four million, six hundred thousand dollars ($4,600,000). The Rockies respectfully request that this arbitration panel enter a decision against Fowler and for the Rockies in the amount of four million dollars for the reasons provided in the following sections.

II. Length and Consistency of Fowler’s Career Contribution

The Rockies drafted Fowler in the fourteenth round of the 2004 draft. He spent his first professional season in the rookie league where he performed admirably. 2006 brought about Fowler’s move to Class A ball, where he had another solid season and was named the fourth best prospect in the Rockies farm system. The one glaring red flag from this season was Fowler’s nearly one-month absence from the team due to an ankle sprain. In 2007, Fowler was promoted to Class A+, but only played sixty five games before going on the DL again, this for the remainder of the season for a broken hand.

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1 Mlb.com Player Page – Dexter Fowler http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=451594
2 Id
3 Id
4 Id
5 Baseball Prospectus Dexter Fowler Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=47493
Fowler began the 2008 season with Class AA Tulsa, but was eventually called up to the majors and joined the 40-man roster on September 2. Fowler eased his way into big league play over the last few games, and managed to stay off the injury report all season. 2009 was Fowler’s first full rookie year. Fowler ended up with solid numbers, and set Rockies rookie records in doubles and stolen bases. Fowler also had the second most strikeouts by a Rockies rookie in franchise history that season. Fowler unfortunately ended up back on the injury report with a calf contusion and a knee contusion in June and September respectively, for which he missed seventeen games in total.

Fowler started 2010 on the active roster, but was optioned to the Class AAA Sky Sox on May 31 where he spent 27 games. Fowler was eventually recalled on June 29 and came back to perform well, leading the majors in triples and exceeding club expectations after his stint in the minors. Fowler was on the injury report four times in 2010 and missed one game due to injury. Fowler improved on his last season in terms of batting statistics, but was again sidelined with injury and put on the fifteen day Disabled List for an abdominal strain. He spent another month with the AAA Sky Sox where he played twenty four games and posted similar numbers to those he was posting in the majors. When he came back to the Rockies, Fowler was batting just .238 and had two strikeouts for every walk he drew.

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6 [Mlb.com Player Page – Dexter Fowler](http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=451594)
7 [Id](#)
8 [Id](#)
9 [Baseball Prospectus Dexter Fowler Player Card](http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=47493)
10 [Mlb.com Player Page – Dexter Fowler](http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=451594)
11 [Id](#)
12 [Baseball Prospectus Dexter Fowler Player Card](http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=47493)
13 [Mlb.com Player Page – Dexter Fowler](http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=451594)
15 [Id](#)
Fowler has had an overall satisfactory career, but inconsistent numbers and persistent injuries make it hard for the Rockies to feel comfortable paying any more than four million dollars for Fowler in the upcoming season.

III. Quality of Fowler’s Contribution to the Rockies 2012 Season

In 2012, Fowler had some of the best numbers of his career in many of the major hitting categories (batting average, RBI, home runs, and hits)\(^\text{16}\). Fowler posted a batting average of .300 for the first time in his career, which brought his career average up to .271.\(^\text{17}\) He is a dependable leadoff hitter with above average power, and Fowler is a regular contributor to the scoring of the Rockies. However, Fowler is far from the most valuable player on the Rockies when comparing his statistics to those of his teammates from last season. Fowler led the team in strikeouts and in number of times he was caught stealing\(^\text{18}\). These two categories are some of the biggest momentum changing plays in the game of baseball, and Fowler’s performance in these categories had a negative effect on the Rockies ability to score runs. Fowler only led the team in triples (by 1 triple), and did not lead the team in any other offensive category\(^\text{19}\).

Fowler may have had some of the best hitting numbers of his career, but his 2012 statistics did not stack up favorably against those of his fellow centerfielders. Looking at eleven of the favorable standard offensive statistics for hitters (runs, hits, doubles, triples, home runs, RBI, walks, stolen bases, batting average, slugging percentage, and on base percentage), Fowler only ranks among the top ten MLB centerfielders in two of these categories\(^\text{20}\). Furthermore, Fowler, who is touted for his speed, ranked a dismal twenty-eighth in stolen bases among center fielders.

\(^{17}\) Id.
\(^{18}\) Colorado Rockies Official Website. http://colorado.rockies.mlb.com/stats/
\(^{19}\) Baseball Reference Dexter Fowler Player Page http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/f/fowlede01.shtml
last year\textsuperscript{21}. These numbers do not portray the image of an elite outfielder who should be rewarded with a doubling of his salary from last year.

Additionally, the majority of Fowler’s extra base hits and home runs in 2012 came at the Rockies home park, Coors Field. Coors Field is a unique and wonderful stadium, but it sits at an altitude of 5,280 feet. This affects the game in a number of ways, but most importantly, the ball travels further off of the bat because the low air density that exists at high altitude produces less friction against the ball. Fowler had five more extra base hits at home than he had away from Coors Field\textsuperscript{22}. Most notable is the discrepancy in Fowler’s home run total, as Fowler hit over three times as many home runs at home than he did on the road\textsuperscript{23}. Fowler has always had better hitting stats at home over his career, and the altitude of Coors Field is certainly a factor that his inflated Fowler’s hitting statistics.

Fowler also continued his list of injuries that dates back to 2006. Fowler was on the injury report eleven different times in 2012 for various ailments including tendonitis in the wrist, two ankle sprains, shoulder and back soreness, and an illness\textsuperscript{24}. All together, Fowler was away from the team for fifteen days and missed fourteen games\textsuperscript{25}. Fowler’s continued injuries show signs of undependability and provide another reason why the Rockies offer of four million is more than fair. While Fowler is progressing positively in many ways, his numbers from 2012 do not justify the salary he has requested.

\textsuperscript{22} Id
\textsuperscript{23} Id
\textsuperscript{24} Baseball Prospectus Dexter Fowler Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=47493
\textsuperscript{25} Id
IV. Comparative Baseball Salaries

a. Michael Bourn

Fowler is now in his second arbitration eligible year, and value can be best determined when comparing his performance in 2012 to the performance of similar center fielders in their respective second years of arbitration eligibility. Starting most recently, Fowler’s season can be compared to the 2010 season of the then Astros center fielder Michael Bourn (“Bourn’’). Bourn received $4,400,000 that year, which is just above Fowler’s midpoint, but he put up the numbers and accolades to be worthy of this figure and is certainly more than $100,000 more valuable than Fowler. Bourn led the National League in stolen bases for the second consecutive season, and received the Fielding Bible Award Winner as the best center fielder in Major League Baseball.\(^{26}\) More impressively, Bourn was selected as an All-Star and finished the season with his second consecutive Gold Glove Award.\(^{27}\)

When compared directly to Fowler, Bourn compares similarly but overall favorably. Bourn also missed the same number of games due to injury as Fowler in his platform year. However, Bourn outperformed Fowler in runs scored, hits, doubles, and strikeouts\(^{28}\). The most glaring area in which Bourn dominates Fowler is in stolen bases. As mentioned, Bourn led the NL in stolen bases that season with fifty two. That is over four times the number of Fowler’s total, as he only managed to steal twelve bases that season\(^{29}\). Fowler even managed to play in two more games than Bourn, but still could not reach Bourn’s totals in these telling offensive categories\(^{30}\).

\(^{26}\) Mlb.com Player Page - Michael Bourn http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=456422  
\(^{28}\) Id  
\(^{29}\) Id  
\(^{30}\) Id
Defensively, Bourn proved to be a much more effective and efficient fielder than Fowler. Bourn recorded over one hundred more putouts than Fowler, twice as many assists than Fowler, and committed half of the errors that Fowler did. The statistics of putouts and assists are indicators of direct contribution to a player recording outs for his team. Errors are opportunities missed to record an out for the team. Adding up putouts and assists, and subtracting the error total for the outs missed, Bourn was responsible for one hundred nine (109) more outs than Fowler in their respective platform years (364-255)\textsuperscript{31}\textsuperscript{32}. These numbers are what led to Bourn’s outstanding season as a fielder, and unanimous recognition as one of the best center fielders in baseball.

The comparison to Bourn is certainly one worth considering for Fowler, but given his accolades as an All-Star and Gold Glove winner, his astounding stolen base numbers, and his tremendous fielding ability, Bourn is discernibly more valuable than Fowler, and therefore, a salary figure of $4,000,000 is generous and more appropriate.

b. Melky Cabrera

The second comparable season to Fowler’s 2012 year was the 2009 season of Melky Cabrera (“Cabrera”), when he was eligible for arbitration a second time. That year, Cabrera played for the Yankees, and was given $3,100,000 for his services after the 2009 season\textsuperscript{33}. Cabrera appeared on the injury report twice that season, but only missed four games\textsuperscript{34}. Fowler may have outperformed Cabrera in a couple of offensive categories, but overall did nothing to suggest statistically that he was any amount better than Cabrera offensively. Fowler had three

\textsuperscript{32} Baseball Reference Dexter Fowler Player Page http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/f/fowler01.shtml
\textsuperscript{33} Baseball Prospectus Melky Cabrera Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=45397
\textsuperscript{34} Id.
more hits than Cabrera, ten more triples, and six more runs scored, but Cabrera out performed Fowler in doubles by ten, RBI by fifteen, and they tied in number of home runs with thirteen. Fowler also struck out sixty-nine more times than Cabrera, but drew twenty-five more walks than Cabrera as some consolation.

Defensively, Cabrera outperformed Fowler in almost every statistical category. Cabrera recorded forty-three more putouts, and committed half of the errors that Fowler did. Fowler did manage to record one more assist than Cabrera, but overall, Cabrera was responsible for more outs than Fowler over the course of the season. Again, Fowler’s numbers fail to reach the level of a player that was paid just $3,100,000 by the biggest spending team in MLB.

Fowler may have had his best year in 2012, but still failed to compare favorably to a player who made $900,000 less than what the Rockies are offering Fowler. When looking at the statistics, Fowler did not outperform Cabrera in most areas and the results do not warrant a judgment that would entitle Fowler to be paid $1,500,000 more than what Cabrera made for his services in his respective platform year.

c. Marlon Byrd

Marlon Byrd (“Byrd”) was eligible for his second year of arbitration in 2009, so his statistics in 2008 when he played for the Rangers must be compared as a platform year to Fowler’s 2012 numbers. Byrd received $3,060,000 after this season, a season much like

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38 Id.
Cabrera’s 2009 season\textsuperscript{39}. Byrd spent three weeks in Class AAA rehabbing from a knee injury that season, but still managed to hit the ball well\textsuperscript{40}. Fowler and Byrd ended up two runs apart on the stat sheet. Fowler had more hits, triples and home runs, but Byrd had ten more doubles, and they tied on the number of RBI. This was due to the seven homers Byrd hit with men on base, two of which were grand slams. Nine of Fowler’s home runs in 2012 were solo, compared to only four of Byrd’s 2008 homers that were solo shots\textsuperscript{41}. Byrd was more impactful with his home runs in this regard because more men scored when the home runs were hit.

Defensively, Byrd and Fowler were comparable, but the argument could be made that Byrd was more valuable in his 2008 season. Byrd recorded more putouts than Fowler and also recorded three more assists.\textsuperscript{42} Fowler and Byrd had the same number of errors.\textsuperscript{43} These stats are even more impressive for Byrd considering he played in seventy eight fewer innings than Fowler in the field.\textsuperscript{44} Byrd’s key statistics in the field in his second arbitration eligible year are stronger than Fowler’s in his platform year, and show that Byrd is more valuable as a defensive asset.

Byrd has favorable offensive and defensive numbers in most categories when compared with Fowler’s numbers. Byrd’s salary of just over three million dollars sets a bar that Fowler failed to raise last season. Even so, the Rockies are willing to offer Fowler four million dollars for his service, and feel that this is more than a fair representation of Fowler’s value.

\section*{V. Record of Fowler’s Past Compensation}

\textsuperscript{39} Baseball Prospectus Marlon Byrd Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=BYRD19770830A
\textsuperscript{40} Id
\textsuperscript{41} Baseball Reference Marlon Byrd Player Page http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/b/byrdma01.shtml
\textsuperscript{42} Baseball Reference Marlon Byrd Player Page http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/b/byrdma01.shtml
\textsuperscript{43} Id.
\textsuperscript{44} Id.
Fowler was given a $925,000 signing bonus when he was drafted in 2004, a fourteenth round record at the time of signing\textsuperscript{45}. Fowler’s first contract with the Rockies was in 2009, when he signed for $401,000\textsuperscript{46}. Similarly, he signed for $406,000 in 2010 and $424,000 in 2011\textsuperscript{47}. Fowler was arbitration eligible for the first time last year, and avoided arbitration by resigning for $2,350,000, bringing his career earnings up to a total of $3,581,000\textsuperscript{48}.

VI. Physical or Mental Defects on the Part of the Player

Fowler has no known mental defects, but is clearly prone to many injuries to many parts of his body. Fowler has been on the injury report for sixteen different reasons in his short career, and has missed games in nearly every season sue to some form of injury.\textsuperscript{49} Fowler has injured over his three year career his: lover leg, left and right knee, arm, right and left ankle trunk, right wrist, left shoulder, elbow, and abdomen.

VII. Recent performance record of the Club

The Rockies have only made the playoffs once since Fowler made his major league debut, and have finished in the bottom three in the NL West in all but one season.\textsuperscript{50} In Fowler’s five seasons in the majors, the Rockies have only finished with a record above .500 twice, and not only has attendance declined the last three seasons, but the Rockies ranked last in attendance last season\textsuperscript{51}.

\textsuperscript{45} Baseball Prospectus Dexter Fowler Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=47493
\textsuperscript{46} Id.
\textsuperscript{47} Id.
\textsuperscript{48} Id.
\textsuperscript{49} Baseball Prospectus Dexter Fowler Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=47493
\textsuperscript{50} Colorado Rockies Offici al Websitehttp://colorado.rockies.mlb.com/stats
\textsuperscript{51} Id.
VIII. Conclusion

With regard to Fowler’s future, the Rockies feel that the suggested salary of four million dollars is a generous offer for the upcoming season. Not only is his comparatively not valued any amount above four million dollars, but his overall body of work is not reliable enough for the Rockies to feel comfortable making such an investment. For the foregoing reasons, the Rockies respectfully request that this arbitration hearing be ruled in favor of the Rockies and against Fowler’s proposed offer of $4,600,000.