Tommy Hanson v. Atlanta Braves

Submission on Behalf of Tommy Hanson

Team 18
I. Introduction

Tommy Hanson (“Tommy”) is a 6’6” 220lb. starting right-handed pitcher (“RHP”) for the Atlanta Braves (“Braves”). Tommy made his Major League Baseball (“MLB”) debut on June 7, 2009, and has accumulated 3.120 years of major league service. Pursuant to Article VI, Section E, Part 10 (a) & (b) of the current MLB Collective Bargaining Agreement, Tommy is eligible for this salary arbitration proceeding, and submits a salary figure of four million, three hundred dollars ($4,300,000) for the upcoming 2013 season. Tommy feels that the Braves offer of three million five hundred thousand dollars ($3,500,000) undervalues his contribution as a pitcher, and he requests that the arbitration panel enter a judgment in his favor for the following reasons.

II. Length and Consistency of Tommy’s Career Contribution

Tommy was drafted in the 2005 draft by the Atlanta Braves, and started his minor league career in 2006 with the rookie League Danville Braves. Tommy only gave up two home runs that season, and was named as a Top 5 prospect in the Appalachian League. In 2007, after a promising start in Class A ball with the Rome Braves in which he won Pitcher of the Year honors for the team, Tommy was moved up to Class A+ and finished the year with the Myrtle Beach Pelicans. Tommy recorded 154 strikeouts in 2007, which was the highest strikeout total of any pitcher at any level in the Atlanta Braves organization that year. 2008 was Tommy’s last full season in the minor leagues, and he left on a very high note. Tommy started the year in Myrtle Beach and was named the best pitching prospect in the Carolina League that year by

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1 Baseball Prospectus Tommy Hanson Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=52080
2 Mlb.com Player Page – Tommy Hanson http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=462102
3 Id.
4 Id.
Tommy was moved up to Class AA ball in Mississippi and finished his season there. Tommy then played in the Arizona Fall League during the off-season, and became the first pitcher in the history of the league to be named MVP. Tommy won the triple crown that season by going undefeated in seven starts with a 0.63 ERA, and Tommy held opponents to a .160 batting average.

Tommy entered his 2009 season as Baseball America’s fourth best prospect in all of baseball, and spent the first part of his 2009 season in Class AAA Gwinnett until he was called up to the Atlanta Braves on June 7. Tommy started twenty-one games for the Braves that season and ended up as the second Braves rookie in history to win his first five starts. That season also marked a career low 2.89 ERA which was the lowest ERA for a Braves rookie with at least 20 starts since 1943. Tommy finished third in the National League (“NL”) Rookie of the Year voting, receiving two first place votes, six second place votes, and nine third place votes.

2010 was Tommy’s first full season in the majors and he certainly did not disappoint. Tommy led the team in strikeouts, and was the co-leader in games started (34) which was the second most in the majors. Tommy was unfortunate in some of his win-loss decisions that season as well. He left the game six different times with the lead only to have the game end up as a no-decision after the lead was lost. Hanson also did not receive much run support in his starts. The Braves averaged two runs when Tommy was in the game, and just four runs total in

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5 Mlb.com Player Page – Tommy Hanson http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=462102
6 Id
7 Id.
8 Id.
9 Mlb.com Player Page – Tommy Hanson http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=462102
10 Id
11 Id
12 Id
games that Tommy started\textsuperscript{13}. Still, Tommy managed to post an average of 0.622 home runs per nine innings (HR/9), and had a strikeout-to-walk ratio (SO/BB) of 3.089 which were both good enough to rank him tenth among NL pitchers in each category that year\textsuperscript{14}.

Looking to build positive momentum after his 2010 season, 2011 brought about frustration in the form of an injury. For the first time in his career, Tommy missed games to an injury, and in this case, he missed about one third of the season; sixty-two games in total.\textsuperscript{15} Tommy was experiencing tendonitis in his right shoulder that never healed properly and lead to a rotator cuff strain.\textsuperscript{16} He did manage 142 strikeouts in 130 innings during his twenty-two starts which ranked third best on the Braves, and ranked him fifth in the league in strikeouts per nine innings (SO/9).\textsuperscript{17} Tommy also ranked fourth among starting NL pitchers in opponent batting average (.219).\textsuperscript{18} These numbers show Tommy’s resilience, and his ability to provide consistent production despite his injury.

III. Quality of Tommy’s Contribution to the Braves 2012 Season

Tommy was a reliable starter for the Braves last season. He was just two starts shy of the NL lead with thirty-one games started\textsuperscript{19}. Hanson was also ranked thirteenth among starters in his number of strikeouts per nine innings (SO/9).\textsuperscript{20} At the end of the season, Tommy ranked first on

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Mlb.com Player Page – Tommy Hanson http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=462102
\item \textsuperscript{14} Baseball Reference Tommy Hanson Player Page http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/h/hansoto01.shtml
\item \textsuperscript{15} Baseball Prospectus Tommy Hanson Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=52080
\item \textsuperscript{16} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Mlb.com Player Page – Tommy Hanson http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=462102
\item \textsuperscript{18} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{19} ESPN.com MLB Player Pitching Stats 2012 http://espn.go.com/mlb/stats/pitching/_/league/nl
\item \textsuperscript{20} Id
\end{itemize}
the Braves in number strikeouts, second on the team in wins, and third in innings pitched. Tommy’s strikeouts accounted for thirteen percent of all the strikeouts thrown by all twenty-one pitchers on the Braves pitching staff last year. These rankings show that Tommy was not only a regular contributor to the Braves, but was one of the most valuable pitchers on the team.

Admittedly, Tommy’s 2012 numbers were not worthy of any national awards, but his statistics are not necessarily what they appear to be on their face. Although Tommy gave up twenty seven home runs last season, only one third of those were when men were on base. This does not change the number of home runs that Tommy gave up, but it does minimize the damage that was done because of the minimal impact of the home run allowed. A player who allowed ten fewer home runs but has ten more men on base when those home runs were hit still allowed as many runs on the scoreboard as Tommy. Again in 2012, Tommy received little in terms of run support. In all ten of his losses, the team only scored two runs or fewer.

While this does not excuse his losses, it certainly provides some evidence that Tommy’s performance was not the only factor contributing to any of his losses. The real value of Tommy’s performance can be determined by comparing his numbers to those of other similar players.

IV. Comparative Baseball Salaries

A. Jered Weaver

Tommy is in his first year of arbitration eligibility, and so his statistics from 2012 must be compared to those of other pitchers in their platform year, whatever that year may be. In the case

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21 ESPN.com Atlanta Braves Pitching Stats http://espn.go.com/mlb/team/stats/pitching/_/name/atl/seasontype/2
22 Id.
of Jered Weaver (“Weaver”), the year to be compared is 2009. After the 2009 season, the Los Angeles Angels paid Weaver $4,625,000 for one year and avoided arbitration\(^\text{25}\). While this figure is more than Tommy is requesting for the upcoming season, many of their statistics are comparable.

Tommy let up thirteen fewer hits than Weaver at season’s end (183-196), and in this regard is less of a liability than Weaver was in his platform season\(^\text{26}\). Along those same lines, Tommy also earned one fewer run than Weaver (87-88)\(^\text{27}\). While Weaver had the advantage in ERA and walks allowed (by a margin of six walks), Tommy averaged more strikeouts per nine innings (8.3-7.4) and had similar home runs per nine innings average (1.1-1.4)\(^\text{28}\). While Tommy’s home run total allowed last season is above average, it is only one home run more than Weaver allowed in his platform season\(^\text{29}\). Weaver’s twenty–six home runs allowed show that this is not a factor that would keep a team from paying a pitcher over four million dollars and sets a precedent for the Braves to follow. Although Weaver’s salary is above what Tommy is requesting, the numbers can be compared similarly, and likewise, so should their salary figures.

\section*{B. Chien-Ming Wang}

Chien-Ming Wang (“Wang”) was given a one year deal worth four million dollars ($4,000,000) after his first year of arbitration eligibility in 2008\(^\text{30}\). While this figure is still above the midpoint salary in this hearing, the statistical numbers between the two are comparable.

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\begin{itemize}
\item \(^\text{25}\) Baseball Prospectus Jered Weaver Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=49127
\item \(^\text{26}\) Baseball Reference Jered Weaver Player Page http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/w/weaveje02.shtml
\item \(^\text{27}\) Baseball Reference Tommy Hanson Player Page http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/h/hansoto01.shtml
\item \(^\text{28}\) Id
\item \(^\text{29}\) Baseball Reference Jered Weaver Player Page http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/w/weaveje02.shtml
\item \(^\text{30}\) Baseball Prospectus Chien-Ming Wang Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=31803
\end{itemize}
Tommy started one more game than Wang that season, but posted a strikeout-to-walk ratio that was a half point higher than Wang’s (2.27-1.76). Wang did have a lower ERA and allowed fewer runs than Tommy (87-82), but Tommy allowed sixteen fewer hits over the course of his platform year (183-199). While Wang is better than Tommy in some respects statistically, other categories show figures that do not favor Wang and demonstrate an all around comparability between the seasons of the two.

There are two glaring differences in the statistics of Wang from his platform year to those of Tommy’s. The first is the home runs given up. Tommy was not close to Wang in this category, and gave up one more home run per nine innings than Wang did (1.4-0.4)\(^31\). While this does not look good comparatively, there was not a single pitcher in MLB that would look good comparatively against that statistic. Wang’s 0.4 average was the lowest by any pitcher in the MLB that year, and was truly an admirable accomplishment.\(^32\)

While Wang’s home run numbers were impressive his platform year, Tommy’s strikeout numbers were equally impressive comparatively. With another great year of strikeouts, Tommy eclipsed Wang’s strikeout total by fifty-seven (161-104). The difference in inning total between the two pitchers gave Wang over forty more chances to record a strikeout, and yet he still fell short of Tommy’s total by fifty-seven.\(^33\) This strikeout total also gave Tommy a strikeout per nine inning ratio that was almost double that of Wang’s in his platform year (8.3-4.7). The ability to strikeout a batter is a crucial skill for all pitchers, but the ones who do it well can change the momentum and flow of a game at their will. Tommy’s ability to strike out hitters

\(^{31}\)Baseball Reference Chien-Ming Wang Player Page
http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/w/wangch01.shtml

\(^{32}\)Baseball Reference Chien-Ming Wang Player Page
http://www.baseball-reference.com/players/w/wangch01.shtml

\(^{33}\)Id
is his strong suit, and it shows when compared to the numbers of Wang, who received a salary above the current midpoint in his platform year.

C. Joe Blanton

To compare a pitcher that is more along the lines of what the Braves say Tommy is, then an accurate comparison is to the statistics of Joe Blanton (“Blanton”). Blanton was pitching for Oakland in his platform year, and was awarded a salary of $3,800,000 that offseason. Blanton started thirty-four games that season which was good enough for most in the majors. However, Blanton did not do so well in his plethora of starts, and also led the league in hits allowed. This was fifty-seven more hits than Tommy’s total hits allowed in his platform year. Blanton also gave up fourteen more runs than Tommy (87-101) and Tommy again had the upper hand in strikeouts comparatively. Tommy managed twenty-one more strikeouts than Blanton, and averaged three more strikeouts per nine innings (8.3-5.5).

Tommy did not outperform Blanton in every category (ERA, walks, and home runs), but the number of hits allowed by Blanton in his platform year was abysmal, and Blanton was still paid more than what the Braves are offering Tommy. Certainly if Tommy had given up anywhere near the number of hits that Blanton did in his platform year, a salary like the one Blanton received would be appropriate. However, with his better numbers in a most standard pitching

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37 Baseball Prospectus Tommy Hanson Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=52080
categories, Tommy should be awarded his salary requested because the midpoint is just above Blanton’s 2008 salary.

V. Record of Tommy’s Past Compensation

Tommy received a three hundred twenty five thousand ($325,000) signing bonus when he was drafted.39 Tommy was then on minor league pay until 2010 when he made four hundred thirty-five thousand dollars ($435,000).40 Tommy earned slightly more in 2011 than he did in 2010 ($456,500), and was signed for five hundred thirty-five thousand dollars ($535,000) last year, bringing his career earnings up to a mere $1,426,500.41

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

Tommy has no major mental or physical defects. His only injuries of note are the previously mentioned shoulder issue in 2011 and a lower back strain sustained in July that landed him a stint on the disabled list.42

VII. Recent Performance of the Club

Since Tommy was called up to the majors, the Braves have finished second in the NL East every year.43 Two of those seasons were 90-win seasons, and earned the Braves a trip to the

40 Id
41 Id
42 Baseball Prospectus Tommy Hanson Player Card http://www.baseballprospectus.com/card/card.php?id=52080
playoffs. The Braves were not a playoff team for the four seasons before Tommy was called up to the majors. In 2010, the Braves made it to the NLDS, where they were defeated in five games by the eventual World Series Champion San Francisco Giants\textsuperscript{44}. The 2011 season in which the Braves did not make the playoffs still landed them one win shy of ninety\textsuperscript{45}. 2012 was a better year for the Braves, but they fell victim to the St. Louis Cardinals in the new one-game playoff rule that was implemented for the Wild Card round\textsuperscript{46}. Two out of three years in the playoffs is a pretty good average, and a player like Tommy who has been an integral member of the pitching staff those two years certainly affords him some of the credit for the Braves recent success.

VIII. Conclusion

While Tommy may not be coming off of the best year in his career, he has proved to be a reliable and consistent closer, with his numbers among the team leaders in many categories every year. His strikeout ability and longevity throughout the season make him a valuable starting pitching asset. Compared to salaries that many of his predecessors have received in their platform year, and for the other aforementioned reasons, Tommy respectfully requests that this arbitration panel enter a judgment for him in the amount of $4,300,000

\textsuperscript{43} Atlantabraves.com Team Stats Page
http://atlanta.braves.mlb.com/stats sortable.jsp?c_id=atl#sectionType=st&elem=%5Bobject+Object%5D&tab_level=child&click_text=Sortable+Team+hitting&statType=hitting&page=1&ts=1357786396566
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\textsuperscript{46} Id