2013 National Baseball Arbitration Competition

Tommy Hanson v. Atlanta Braves

Submission on Behalf of Atlanta Braves
Prepared by Team 4
Midpoint: $3.9 million
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I. Introduction and Request for a Hearing Decision

This brief analyzes the assets and contributions of right-handed pitcher Tommy Hanson (the “Player” or “Hanson”) to be reflected in his 2013 contract with the Atlanta Braves (“the Club” or “the Braves”). This arbitration hearing is governed by the Major League Baseball (“MLB”) Collective Bargaining Agreement (“CBA”). The CBA establishes that the following criteria shall be considered in determining the player’s award: (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 contributions; (3) the record of the Player’s past compensation; (4) comparative 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. 1 Mr. Hanson has reached 3.120 years of MLB service, entitling him to file a request for arbitration for his first time.

Mr. Hanson has shown strong potential and has been a valued member of the Braves over the last four seasons; however, Hanson’s performance has declined every season since his brilliant rookie campaign. Additionally, Mr. Hanson has shown a propensity for injuries over the past two seasons. For these reasons, the Club has concerns about Hanson’s potential moving forward. The evidence of his past performance and future potential presented in this brief and in oral argument demonstrates that Mr. Hanson is fairly entitled to a salary below the $3.9 million midpoint between his offer and that of the Club. The Braves respectfully request that this panel find that he is entitled to a 2013 salary arbitration award of $3.5 million.

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II. Quality of Mr. Hanson’s Contribution to the Club in 2012

Returning from a torn rotator cuff injury that sidelined him for the final two months of the 2011 season, Mr. Hanson put forth a decent, but disappointing season for the Braves in 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1: Tommy Hanson 2012 Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Mr. Hanson set a career high in 2012 with 13 wins and the Braves went 20-11 in games in which he started, a deeper look into Mr. Hanson’s 2012 performance shows that his good record should be more attributed to the high level of run support he received than his pitching. The Braves scored an average of 4.54 in games started by Hanson, a number that was the eighth highest total in the MLB in 2012, but only 4.26 runs in games started by other pitchers, which was only the 19th most runs per game among MLB teams. Mr. Hanson cannot attribute any of this higher run support to his own batting as he managed only one single in 61 plate appearances, yielding a batting average of .020, the worst among all pitchers in the National League.

Mr. Hanson was a valuable member of the 2012 Braves team as he led all Braves pitchers in the number of games started (31), followed by Mike Minor (30) and Tim Hudson (28). Mr. Hanson also outpaced all other Braves pitchers in strikeouts, ranked second among Braves pitchers in the number of wins and third in the number of innings pitched. Unfortunately, the rest of Mr. Hanson’s numbers are not nearly as positive. Mr. Hanson tied for the most losses among Braves pitchers; he surrendered the most earned runs, and gave up the most hits, home

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4 Supra note 2.
runs, and walks of all Braves pitchers. Additionally, his ERA was the worst of all Braves pitchers starting more than 10 games.\(^5\)

Further, beyond his subpar cumulative numbers, the Braves are especially concerned about the negative statistical trend Mr. Hanson exhibited during the 2012 season.

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Month} & \text{GS} & \text{W} & \text{L} & \text{IP} & \text{ERA} \\
\hline
\text{April} & 5 & 3 & 2 & 30.0 & 3.00 \\
\text{May} & 6 & 2 & 2 & 31.0 & 4.65 \\
\text{June} & 5 & 4 & 0 & 31.2 & 3.13 \\
\text{July} & 6 & 3 & 1 & 33.1 & 6.21 \\
\text{August} & 3 & 0 & 2 & 15.2 & 5.74 \\
\text{September} & 5 & 1 & 2 & 27.0 & 4.00 \\
\text{October} & 1 & 0 & 1 & 6.0 & 7.50 \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

As made evident by the table above, Mr. Hanson weakened considerably as the season went on. Even his strong win-loss record becomes less impressive when considering the table above — Hanson started the season 12-5 only to go 1-5 to end the season with his 13-10 record. As a result of his consistently worsening performance, Mr. Hanson was left off the Braves playoff roster.\(^7\)

**III. Length and Consistency of Career Contribution**

Over his first four seasons in the Major Leagues, Mr. Hanson has shown the potential that had him ranked by *Baseball America* as the fourth best prospect after his outstanding 2008 minor league season where he split time between High-A and Double-A.\(^8\) Mr. Hanson has been firmly entrenched in the Braves’ starting rotation and has started 108 games over the last four seasons to

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\(^6\) Supra note 2.


the tune of a 45-32 record. Unfortunately, Mr. Hanson’s best work came in his rookie season, but his production has declined each season since.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>GS</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>IP</th>
<th>ERA</th>
<th>H/9</th>
<th>BB/9</th>
<th>SO/9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>127.2</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>202.2</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>130.0</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>174.2</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>635.0</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite his decrease in production over the last couple of seasons, the Braves continue to value Mr. Hanson’s contributions to the Club and have a high degree of optimism that he will be able to return to the impressive form he displayed in his first two seasons in the Major Leagues. The Braves hope that Mr. Hanson’s decrease in effectiveness over the last two seasons can be attributed to the shoulder injury that cut his 2011 season short. This injury will be discussed in detail in the following section.

However, while the Braves continue to believe in Mr. Hanson’s talent and are hopeful for his future, per CBA Arbitration guidelines, the Club intends to compensate Mr. Hanson based on his most recent performance in his platform season rather than for how he played two or three years ago. Although the Braves remain confident in Mr. Hanson’s potential, the Club would prefer to see some stronger evidence that Mr. Hanson will indeed become a star before they pay him like one.

IV. Existence of Physical or Mental Defects

Mr. Hanson has shown no evidence of suffering from any mental defects that should limit his compensation. The same could be said about his physical condition until recently. Mr. Hanson made it through his prep career, minor league baseball career, and first two Major

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9 Supra note 2.
League seasons without any reported injury. However, Mr. Hanson’s 2011 season was cut short by a shoulder injury that continues to cause alarming concern for the Braves.

Mr. Hanson was first placed on the 15 day disabled list (“the DL”) on June 17, 2011 after an MRI indicated he was suffering from shoulder tendonitis, or inflammation, in his right shoulder. After this short stint on the DL, Hanson returned to pitch effectively for a couple of weeks leading up to the 2011 All-Star Break. However, Mr. Hanson gave up 24 runs over his five starts following the All-Star break and demonstrated a lowering velocity. On August 14, 2011, the Braves placed Hanson back on the DL hoping that his condition would improve with additional rest.\(^\text{10}\) Unfortunately, it was determined on August 26, 2011, that Hanson had suffered a small tear to his rotator cuff and spent the remainder of the 2011 season on the DL.\(^\text{11}\)

Mr. Hanson reported to Spring Training in 2012 with the expectation that he was fully healthy. Only two days into Spring Training, Mr. Hanson was the victim of some bad luck as he was involved in a one-car accident in which he suffered a mild concussion. Fortunately, Mr. Hanson was cleared to return to action just a few days later and has not had any issue with the injury.\(^\text{12}\)

Mr. Hanson was fairly healthy last season, starting 31 games and pitching 174.2 innings, both numbers being the second highest recorded during his short career. However, Mr. Hanson was placed on the 15 day DL on July 31, 2012 because of a strained lower back.\(^\text{13}\) Mr. Hanson missed two scheduled starts before returning to the rotation to start the game on August 17, 2012.


\(^\text{11}\) Id.


It is the position of the Braves that Mr. Hanson continues to suffer from the effects of his 2011 rotator cuff tear and the heavy workload he has endured over his first four seasons. This opinion is supported by the fact that Hanson’s decrease in performance began to occur midway through the 2011 season, just as he began to suffer from shoulder inflammation.

This conclusion is further supported by the fact that Mr. Hanson has been losing velocity on his fastball since 2011. Mr. Hanson’s fastball velocity has gone from an average of 92.9 as a rookie, to 93.5 in 2010, down to 91.9 in 2011, and bottoming out at 90.4 last season—a loss of a staggering 3 miles per hour over the past three years.\textsuperscript{14}

Mr. Hanson’s past shoulder injury and loss of velocity are likely a result of the high amount of innings he pitched early in his career, especially the 202.2 innings Mr. Hanson recorded in 2010, his first full season with the Braves. Since 2003, only 15 pitchers aged 23 or younger have pitched 200 innings in a season. Of these 15 pitchers, four of them (Mark Prior, Dontrelle Willis, Scott Kazmir, and Jeremy Bonderman) have had their careers cut short to injuries. Four others (Chad Billingsly, Jair Jurrjens, Ervin Santana, and Zach Duke) have proved unable to match their early career success, while the jury is still out on three others (Trevor Cahill, Madison Bumgarner, and Mr. Hanson).\textsuperscript{15}

While it is true that Mr. Hanson’s 2012 stint on the DL was for a lower back strain, not a shoulder injury, the Braves believe that Mr. Hanson injured his back as a result of changing his mechanics to overcompensate for his weakened shoulder. The Braves certainly hope that Mr. Hanson’s body is able to regain full strength this offseason, but would like to see an improvement in his velocity and overall performance before they are convinced of his perfect health.

\textsuperscript{14} Braves’ Trade of Hanson Suggests Deeper Concerns About his Future, Sports Illustrated, http://mlb.si.com/2012/11/30/tommy-hanson-jordan-walden-braves-angels-trade/

\textsuperscript{15} Id.
V. Past Compensation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>$435,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>$456,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$535,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr. Hanson’s salaries from 2010-2012 reflect his position as a player controlled by the reserve clause, a situation in which the Braves are not obligated to pay him more than the league minimum, plus a raise for his good performance and added value to the club. The substantial raise to $3.5 million offered by the club for 2013 reflects the Club’s appreciation for Mr. Hanson’s past performance and optimism regarding his potential for the upcoming season based on his Major League performance.

VI. Comparative Salaries of Equivalent Players

The first time arbitration eligible players most comparable to Mr. Hanson over the past four years are Joe Saunders, Scott Feldman, Scott Olsen, and Jeff Nieman. On the following page, Table 5 contains statistics for the aforementioned players during both their platform seasons, careers up to that point, and salary data.

\[16\] Supra note 2.
Mr. Hanson’s case is somewhat unique as most players entering their first arbitration hearing are just beginning to enter the prime of their careers, a notion reflected by a record of improved performance throughout the first few seasons of their career. Conversely, Mr. Hanson’s career began with tremendous success, but his performance has declined each season leading up to this first arbitration hearing.

17 Id.
With this in mind, Joe Saunders is the player most comparable to Mr. Hanson. Not only are both his platform season and career numbers similar to those of Mr. Hanson, but Saunders’s results during his platform season were a decline from his previous performance. Saunders settled with the Los Angeles Angels for $3.7 million, a figure higher than the Braves offer in this case but still below the midpoint. While Hanson’s platform ERA is slightly stronger than Saunders’s ERA, this is more than outweighed by Saunders’ consistency, lack of an injury history, and his status as a left-handed pitcher—a class of players who, due to their scarcity, are generally paid higher than their right-handed counterparts.

As Table 5 indicates, Feldman, Olsen, and Nieman are also comparable to Mr. Hanson based on their platform season statistics and service time. However, all three of these players were awarded under $3 million. Mr. Hanson can be somewhat distinguished from these three players because of his greater career contribution, but again, this is somewhat belied by the fact that his performance has declined over the past three seasons. For these reasons, the Club believes that a 2013 salary of $3.5 million is an appropriate amount for Mr. Hanson.

**VII. Recent Club Performance**

Last season, the Atlanta Braves finished the season with a record of 94-68, finishing second place in the National League East Division for the third straight year. The Braves qualified as one of two wild card teams, but lost the one game playoff against the St. Louis Cardinals. The Braves did not qualify as a wild card team in 2011 despite their second place record of 89-73. In 2010, the Braves finished the regular season with a record of 91-71, good

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enough to make the playoffs as a wild card.\textsuperscript{23} Unfortunately, the Braves would lose in the first round.\textsuperscript{24}

Mr. Hanson has been part of the Braves’ starting rotation is each of the last four seasons and has undoubtedly contributed to the Club’s success. The Club is hopeful that Mr. Hanson will remain healthy and continue to be a contributor to the team moving forward.

\textbf{VII. Summary and Conclusion}

Mr. Hanson has shown tremendous star potential and enjoyed a good amount of success during the course of his short career. Since being promoted to the Atlanta Braves in 2009, he has entrenched himself as a key member of the Club’s starting rotation. However, Mr. Hanson’s performance has declined each year since his breakout rookie campaign and it is questionable whether he will again return to his 2009-2010 form. This drop-off in performance is likely explained by an injury Mr. Hanson suffered to his shoulder in 2011. While the Braves are hopeful that Mr. Hanson will regain his health and have a successful 2013 season, the Club would like to see an increase in Mr. Hanson’s velocity along with improved statistics before they are convinced of his future potential.

Based on the evidence provided in this brief and in oral argument, the Atlanta Braves respectfully request that this panel find the Club’s offer of $3.5 million to be an appropriate salary for the 2013 season.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Id.
\item Id.
\end{enumerate}
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