2013 National Baseball Arbitration Competition

Tommy Hanson v. Atlanta Braves
Submission on Behalf of the Atlanta Braves
Midpoint: $3.9 million
Submission by: Team 9
Table of Contents

I. Introduction ........................................... 1
II. Recent Performance of Club ......................... 2
III. Quality of Past Season ............................ 2
IV. Consistency of Player .............................. 3
V. Physical Defects ..................................... 5
VI. Comparative Salaries of Equivalent Player ....... 7
VII. Player’s Past Salary ............................... 9
VIII. Conclusion ........................................... 9
Introduction and Request for Hearing Decision

This brief evaluates the contributions of right-handed pitcher Tommy Hanson to the Atlanta Braves baseball club from 2009 to 2012. It also serves to analyze Mr. Hanson’s future potential with the club. This arbitration and accompanying brief is governed by Major League Baseball’s Collective Bargaining Agreement. That agreement establishes six criteria in deciding a player’s new salary: (1) the quality of the player’s contribution to the club in the past season; (2) the length and consistency of the player’s career contribution to the team; (3) the player’s past compensation from all teams; (4) comparative salaries from other players in similar situations; (5) the existence of any physical or mental defects on the part of the player; and (6) recent performance of the team.

Mr. Hanson joined the Braves franchise as a top prospect. He is first year arbitration-eligible for the 2013 season. He has put in solid work over the past four years, and has been an asset to the club as it made several playoff appearances. However, his work has not been consistent, and it has declined especially in the last season. Mr. Hanson’s health has also been a concern, and the Braves, though optimistic that Mr. Hanson will continue to be an asset going forward, do have reasons to believe that Mr. Hanson will be unable to pitch a full season as a starter without at least some time on the disabled list. This health concern, as well as lowered pitching output in recent seasons, demonstrate that that Mr. Hanson is deserving of a salary below the $3.9 million midpoint. The Atlanta Braves respectfully ask that the panel find that Mr. Hanson should be properly paid $3.5 million.
**Recent Performance of Club**

After a disappointing 2011 season that saw the Braves go from the top of the National League Wild Card to just under the St. Louis Cardinals in the disheartening “September Collapse,” the club showed improvement in 2012. Returning to their traditions of the 1980s and 90s of leading with strong pitching, the Braves made their way into the National League Wild Card playoff game, in which they fell to the Cardinals. The Braves play in a tough division that has recently seen the rise of the Washington Nationals, but with the talents of players like Mr. Hanson, the club has a bright future.

**Quality of Past Season**

Mr. Hanson’s performance in the 2012 season was generally lower than that of his past seasons, especially 2011. Though Mr. Hanson did lead the club in strikeouts, other numbers dropped off, some of them dramatically. His Earned Run Average, at 4.48, was the highest of any starting pitcher on the team. He allowed more hits than any other pitcher, as well as more home runs.

Indeed, the 2012 season saw a sudden jump in his opponents’ batting average, as demonstrated in the chart below:

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1 Atlanta Braves Club Site, Pitching Statistics, http://atlanta.braves.mlb.com/stats/sortable.jsp
2 *Id.*
3 *Id.*
4 *Id.*
Mr. Hanson’s opponents’ batting average was the highest of any regular starting pitcher on the club in 2012, excepting Jair Jurrjens, who only pitched in eleven games. This statistic lies in stark contrast with the 2009 season, when Mr. Hanson’s opponents’ batting average was second of all the starters.

To be sure, some of these higher numbers are going to be attributed to the sheer number of innings pitched by Mr. Hanson. Mr. Hanson pitched in 174.2 innings in 2012, a respectable amount. The Braves admittedly struggled to reliably fill their fourth and fifth starting pitcher positions, but Mr. Hanson hardly labored alone. Starters Tim Hudson and Mike Minor each put in 179 pitches over the course of the year, but were able to post more impressive statistics.  

Consistency

Mr. Hanson arrived in the Major Leagues as one of the Braves’ top prospects, and in many ways his career started on an upward trend. Recent developments and patterns have been somewhat troubling.

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Mr. Hudson posted a 3.62 ERA on the season, while Mr. Minor managed to post a 4.12. Atlanta Braves Website, pitching statistics, supra note 1.
Mr. Hanson’s ERA has been steadily increasing since his debut in the Majors:\(^6\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Earned Run Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>4.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr. Hanson’s debut ERA was among the best in a competitive bullpen.\(^7\) By 2012, however, Mr. Hanson’s 4.48 ERA is now the lowest of the regular Braves starting pitchers.\(^8\) Mr. Hanson’s ERA has not suffered only among his fellow Braves, but has slid so far that it is now below the Major League Baseball average for pitchers of his age.\(^9\) This lowered ERA marks the first time that Mr. Hanson has slipped below the average for pitchers of his age. Although Mr. Hanson is still able to post respectable ERA numbers, he simply has not been delivering the same performance as he did his rookie season, and the trend has been downward since 2009.

Likely tied to this issue of increasing ERA is the steady decrease in Mr. Hanson’s pitching velocity. As the chart below shows, the player’s velocity has declined since his debut:\(^10\):

\(^6\) Chart derived from MLB Tommy Hanson Site, supra note 9.
\(^7\) Compare to fellow starters Javier Vasquez (2.87) and Jair Jurrgens (2.60). Atlanta Braves Website, 2009 statistics, supra note 1.
\(^8\) Jurrgens’s 6.89 is lower, but he only started in eleven games and is not a good comparison. Atlanta Braves Website, 2009 statistics, supra note 1.
\(^9\) Fangraphs.com, Tommy Hanson, Comparison of ERA. http://www.fangraphs.com/comparison.aspx?playerid=9129&position=P&page=0&players=
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average Fastball Velocity in Miles Per Hour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>92.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A pitcher’s speed is vital to his success on the mound. The faster a pitcher can throw, the more likely he is to strike batters out. Pitchers, of course, use more than just fastballs; breaking balls are a very important part of the game too. Indeed, Mr. Hanson is an adept practitioner of the curveball and the slider. Nonetheless, the player’s reduced velocity has contributed to making him less effective and more likely to give up hits. Home runs in particular have been increasing, going from ten in 2009 to twenty-seven in 2012.

**Physical Defects**

Some of these lower numbers may be attributable to physical injuries suffered by Mr. Hanson in both 2012 and past seasons. In 2011, Mr. Hanson spent thirty days on the disabled list for rotator cuff strain and tendonitis. This past season he had to sit out for seventeen days because of lower back strain. After returning from his back injury in August, Hanson was less

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13 Id.
effective, offering a 4.99 ERA. Mr. Hanson’s physical health issues are great enough to give
the Braves some concern as they assess his future with the club.

Mr. Hanson’s injuries have had a negative impact on the number of injuries he has been
able to pitch. The player has been very inconsistent from year to year in terms of innings
pitched, as the chart below demonstrates:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Innings Pitched</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>127.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>202.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>130.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>174.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If Mr. Hanson is to be paid the full salary of a Major League starting pitcher, the
franchise will need greater assurance that his health problems will not have a negative impact on
his workload.

Mr. Hanson may argue that a high workload exacerbated his injuries. Indeed, he did
pitch for 202 innings in 2010, just a year before his long stint on the disabled list. At the time
Hanson was a young player, and over 200 innings is a sizable workload. Nonetheless, Mr.
Hanson is a starting pitcher, and the nature of his work is such that his body must be able to
function under the workload of the major leagues. To have such injuries as a younger player

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14 Major League Baseball Website, Tommy Hanson statistics, supra note 9.
15 Supra note 9.
16 Supra note 9.
does not bode well for Mr. Hanson’s health looking forward, when 200 innings a year are to be expected from a veteran pitcher.

Comparison to Another Player

Major League Baseball’s collective bargaining agreement allows for the use of comparisons to other players. Such a comparison is useful in assessing Mr. Hanson’s salary prospects. A good player to compare Mr. Hanson with is Ricky Nolasco of the Miami Marlins.

Mr. Nolasco had similar statistics to Mr. Hanson in his first four active years. For the purposes of making this comparison, Mr. Nolasco’s second season has been omitted, as he only played in five games.17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hanson’s ERA</th>
<th>Nolasco’s ERA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>4.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr. Nolasco’s ERA wavered up and down, whereas Mr. Hanson’s had been decreasing. However, Mr. Nolasco pitched over 200 innings of baseball in his second full season, not unlike Mr. Hanson.18

17 Major League Baseball Site, Ricky Nolasco, http://mlb.mlb.com/team/player.jsp?player_id=445060#gameType='R'&sectionType=career&statType=2&season=2012&level='MLB'.
18 Id.
Mr. Nolasco pitched in the same range of number of innings per season as Mr. Hanson has similar strikeout numbers, as demonstrated by this chart:\(^{19}\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hanson Innings Pitched</th>
<th>Hanson Strikeouts</th>
<th>Nolasco Innings Pitched</th>
<th>Nolasco Strikeouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1(^{st})</td>
<td>127.2</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>140.0</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2(^{nd})</td>
<td>202.2</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>212.1</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3(^{rd})</td>
<td>130.0</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>185.0</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>172.4</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>157.2</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chart above indicates that the two players are offering roughly the same workload on an average year, and that the two players are also achieving about the same number of strikeouts per year. These statistics, combined with the fact that the two players’ ERAs are in roughly the same range, make Mr. Nolasco’s statistics a good match for Mr. Hanson’s. Bolstering the strength of the comparison is the fact that the Marlins and the Braves are in the same division, the National League East.\(^{20}\) Though Mr. Nolasco started three years before Mr. Hanson, both men would have to pitch to a similar schedule and more frequently in the same stadiums.

In 2010, Mr. Nolasco’s fourth year of playing for the Marlins full time, he received $3.8 million in salary arbitration. This number is admittedly $300,000 higher than what the Braves are offering Mr. Hanson, but it is $100,000 lower than the midpoint between the two proposals offered by the club and Mr. Hanson. Furthermore, Mr. Nolasco was technically in his fifth year with the Marlins, though he all but sat out his second year, pitching only in 21 innings. Mr.

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\(^{19}\) Data from Major League Baseball websites for Tommy Hanson and Ricky Nolasco, supra notes 9 and 17 respectively.

Noralsco was able to raise his salary by virtue of his slightly longer term of service with the club. Even with this extra year taken into account, the Nolasco/Hanson comparison is useful, and indicates why a $3.5 million salary for Mr. Hanson is reasonable and fair.

Mr. Hanson’s Past Salary

The prelude to the 2013 Major League Baseball season is Mr. Hanson’s first foray into Major League Baseball salary arbitration. His past salaries have been low due to Mr. Hanson’s youth and the fact that was still learning the skills required of a Major League pitcher. The past four years’ lower salaries are also impacted by Mr. Hanson’s recurring injuries and the uncertainty those injuries present.

<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>$456,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$535,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

Tommy Hanson remains a quality starting pitcher that will continue to do great work for the Atlanta Braves, especially as the club retools for the 2013 season. The fact that Mr. Hanson led the club in strikeouts last year speaks to his ability on the mound. Furthermore, Tommy Hanson has four years of experience to offer the Braves, and this experience will make Mr. Hanson a more confident and potent pitcher.
However, some factors exist that give the club some pause before offering the higher salary that Mr. Hanson has requested. His average fastball velocity has been on a downward trend, and now hovers below ninety miles per hour. His ERA has also been rising every year since his debut, and was as high as 4.99 after coming off the disabled list in 2012. His opponents’ batting average continues to climb, especially in relation to the rest of the Braves’ bullpen. Further complicating the situation is Mr. Hanson’s health, which has landed him on the disabled list for long stints in two of his past years and has reduced his value to the franchise. His value is best compared to Mr. Ricky Nolesco, as the two pitchers’ values match up well. Mr. Nolesco made $3.8 million after his second round of salary arbitration, higher than the Braves’ offer because of Mr. Nolesco’s experience, but less than the midpoint between that offer and Mr. Hanson’s offer.

With these factors in mind, the Atlanta Braves would ask the panel to find for its salary offer of $3.5 million. This offer is a fair and equitable one, and should serve to meet both the needs of the club and the player as the Braves look forward to a 2013 season with Tommy Hanson in their lineup.