2013 National Baseball Arbitration Competition

Ike Davis v. New York Metropolitans Baseball Club

Submission on Behalf of New York Metropolitans
Midpoint: $2.7 million
Submission by: Team 11
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I. Introduction and Request for Hearing Decision

This brief is an analysis of the relevant performance and factors allowed by the Major League Baseball Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) to determine the salary arbitration between Major League Baseball’s New York Metropolitans franchise (Mets or Club) and their first year arbitration eligible player, Ike Davis. The CBA is an agreement between the Major League Baseball Players Association and the thirty Major League Baseball (MLB) clubs.¹ The CBA permits arbitrators to consider the following criteria in making its decision: 1) the quality of the player’s contribution during the past season; 2) the length and consistency of the player’s career contributions; 3) the player’s past compensation; 4) the salaries of comparative players; 5) the existence of a player’s physical or mental defects; and 6) the recent performance of the club.² Neither party may offer the financial position of the party, press comments or testimonials (except annual Player awards), prior salary offers, the costs of representation, or salaries in other sports or occupations as evidence.³

Over the 2010-2012 MLB seasons, Davis accrued 2.168 years⁴ of major league service time (MLST)⁵, making him eligible for salary arbitration for the first time in his career as a “Super-Two” player.⁶ Davis seeks $3 million as compensation for the 2013 season. The Mets offer $2.4 million as fair and reasonable compensation. The arbitrator must pick one of these figures.⁷ The mid-point of these two offers is $2.7 million. Therefore, if the panel believes Davis’s fair market value is $2,699,999 the panel should find in the Mets’ favor.

² Id. art. VI(E) § (10)(a). pp. 20-21.
³ Id. art. VI(E) § (10)(b). p. 21.
⁴ Under the CBA, 172 days is equivalent to 1 year. Id. art. XXI(A) § (1). p. 96.
⁶ CBA, art. IV(E) § (1)(a). pp 17-18.
⁷ Id. art. IV(E) § (13). p. 22.
Davis’s statistical contributions throughout his career, as compared with other corner infielders with similar statistical production and service time, show that he is not worth more than the $2.7 million mid-point and, thus, lead to the proper conclusion that $2.4 million is fair and reasonable compensation. Accordingly, it is requested the arbitration panel find in the Mets’ favor.

II. Quality of the Player’s Contribution During the Past Season

In 2012 Davis played in 156 games as the Mets’ everyday first-baseman. Unfortunately, Davis had a disappointing season both at the plate and in the field. As a hitter, Davis produced a split of a .227 batting average (AVG), .308 on-base percentage (OBP), and a .462 slugging percentage (SLG). A closer look at Davis’s numbers show even more disappointment. At home, Davis’s splits were .188/.277/.342. 

While his numbers after the All-Star break (.255/.346/.542) are a marked improvement to his pre All-Star break performance (.201/.271/.388), there is only an illusion of improvement because of an aberrational August (.287/.370/.517) which was sandwiched by a dismal July (.221/.257/.537) and September (.228/.365/.494). In fact, in four of the six months of the season Davis produced an AVG under .230, three months an OBP under .300, and three months of a SLG under .500. Davis posted these disappointing numbers while batting in the middle of the order with 462 of his 519 at-bats (ABs) coming in the four, five, or six spot in the lineup.

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9 Id.
11 Id.
12 Id.
13 Id.
Further, with runners in scoring position (RISP), Davis’s splits were .214/.289/.428 with sixty runs batted in (RBIs) in 159 ABs. Davis’s AVG and OBP were the worst of qualifying National League (NL) first-basemen, while his SLG placed him sixth of nine qualifying NL first-basemen. Ultimately, Davis’s 2012 performance indicated he was only slightly better than a minor-league player contributing a mere 0.7 wins above replacement (WAR) measurement, eighth out of nine qualifying NL first-basemen.

Davis’s defensive performance does not improve the overall evaluation of his 2012 play. Davis was tied for the third most errors of qualifying NL first-basemen with eight and had the third worst range factor (RF) of all qualifying MLB first-basemen, in front of Cincinnati’s Joey Votto and Detroit’s Prince Fielder, both far superior offensive players.

III. Length and Consistency of Career Contributions

Davis made his MLB debut April 19, 2010. The remainder of the 2010 season Davis played at a promising level for a rookie, producing a split of .264/.351/.440. This production resulted in a solid 3.1 WAR and a belief that the Mets had found their first-baseman of the future. This expectation was short-lived, however, as Davis’s 2011 season was cut short due to injury after only thirty-six games and 2012 produced the disappointing statistics discussed above.

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14 Id.
15 In order to qualify for a titles in average-based categories, a player must average at least 3.1 plate appearances for every game his team has played. ESPN.com, http://sports.espn.go.com/mlb/news/story?page=stats/glossary.
17 WAR is a measurement to estimate a player’s value over a theoretical replacement player. For purposes of this brief, Baseball Reference’s WAR statistics will be used. See: http://www.baseball-reference.com/about/war_explained.shtml.
22 Id at Ike Davis Statistics and History, Baseball Reference.
23 Id.
24 Id.
In just over two seasons in the Major Leagues, Davis has shown to be one of the most inconsistent players in baseball. For instance, during his rookie season in 2010, Davis bookended the season with two months of an on-base plus slugging (OPS) of over .900. However, in the four months in between Davis failed to produce an OPS above .766. Additionally, Davis’s short-lived second season appears to be an outlier. In his first season in New York, Davis was a versatile contributor with 33 doubles, 19 home runs, a .351 on-base percentage, and three steals. Yet by his third season Davis morphed into a one-dimensional player – hitting 32 home runs but posting career-lows in nearly every other offensive category including a second straight season with zero steals.

IV. Player’s Past Compensation

For the 2012 season Davis earned a salary worth $26,590 more than league minimum totaling $506,590. For the 2011 season Davis earned a salary worth $17,500 more than league minimum totaling $432,000. Davis received the full value of his 2011 contract despite only playing in 36 games. In 2010 Davis was paid a prorated portion of the $400,000 league minimum after the Mets purchased his minor league contract on April 19, 2010. Additionally, after being drafted eighteenth in the first round of the 2008 first year player draft Davis received a $1.575 million signing bonus.

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25 Id at Ike Davis Splits, Baseball Reference.
26 Id.
27 2012-16 CBA.
28 Id.
30 See: Ike Davis Player Page, Baseball Prospectus.
31 Id.
32 Id.
V. Comparative Baseball Salaries

As a Super-Two arbitration eligible player, Davis’s pool of comparable players at first base is thin. Thus, to provide appropriate comparable players it is crucial to look at the corner infielder position, extending the pool of Super-Two eligible players to third basemen. In 2012, National League first basemen and third basemen provided relatively the same value at the plate. First basemen batted .259 with a .433 slugging percentage while third basemen hit .267 and slugged .425. The following comparisons highlight the similarities between Davis and fellow Super-Two players Ryan Roberts and Chase Headley. Additionally, first baseman Nick Johnson’s first arbitration award provides a useful comparison.

a. Ryan Roberts (1 year/$2.0125 million in 2012)

Roberts provides an apt comparison to Davis as the players have similar career arcs leading up to arbitration eligibility. First, both players followed productive first seasons at the plate with supporting roles in their second full major league season – Davis from a leg injury in 2011 and Roberts from a stint in the minor leagues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Games</th>
<th>Runs</th>
<th>RBI</th>
<th>HR</th>
<th>AVG</th>
<th>OBP</th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>SLG</th>
<th>UZR</th>
<th>WAR</th>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.264</td>
<td>.351</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.440</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.302</td>
<td>.383</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.543</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>.308</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.462</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Games</th>
<th>Runs</th>
<th>RBI</th>
<th>HR</th>
<th>AVG</th>
<th>OBP</th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>SLG</th>
<th>UZR</th>
<th>WAR</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.279</td>
<td>.367</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.416</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.348</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>.341</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.427</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

35 UZR is a defensive metric that uses play-by-play data to estimate each fielder’s defensive contribution in theoretical runs above or below an average fielder. All UZR data in this brief is calculated by Fangraphs. Fangraphs.com, http://www.fangraphs.com/blogs/index.php/the-fangraphs-uzr-primer/.
While Davis out-produced Roberts during their brief second seasons, Roberts’ platform season was the primary reason he procured a $2 million salary. Both players saw a significant surge in power in their third season. However, unlike Davis, Roberts became a multidimensional threat at the plate. Roberts tallied 18 steals in contrast to Davis’s zero swipes. Additionally, Roberts showed an improved patience at the plate, raising his on-base percentage to .341 while Davis’s dropped 75 points to .308. Furthermore, Roberts was a much more consistent performer with a split of .243/.336/.416 at home and .255/.346/.439 on the road.\textsuperscript{37} On the other hand, Davis batted a respectable .262/.355/.566 on the road but put up an abysmal .188/.277/.342 split at home.\textsuperscript{38} Roberts contributed 4.3 runs above average on the defensive end in his platform season.\textsuperscript{39} Conversely, Davis continued a downward trend defensively by producing -1.8 runs in the field.\textsuperscript{40} These factors contributed to a decisive advantage in WAR for Roberts in their platform seasons. Due to the remarkably analogous career paths by the two players, Davis is deserving of a salary closer to the $2 million received by Roberts in 2012 than the $3 million requested.

b. Chase Headley (1 year/$2.325 million in 2011)

San Diego Padres third baseman Chase Headley avoided a Super-Two arbitration hearing before the 2011 season by signing a one-year, $2.325 million contract. Comparing Davis to Headley demonstrates that his value is fairly calculated at $2.4 million.

\textsuperscript{40} Ike Davis Player Page, Fangraphs, http://www.fangraphs.com/statss.aspx?playerid=8433&position=1B.
Table 3: Career-to-Platform Statistical Comparison of Ike Davis and Chase Headley

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Games</th>
<th>Runs</th>
<th>RBI</th>
<th>HR</th>
<th>AVG</th>
<th>OBP</th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>SLG</th>
<th>WAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.252</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.461</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headley</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>.264</td>
<td>.335</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.392</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As described in the above graph, Davis and Headley produced at an extremely similar level during their first three years in the Major Leagues. Although Davis was a more proven run producer, Headley crossed the plate 14 more times and established himself as a threat on the basepaths, including 17 steals in his platform season. While Davis showed a bigger knack for the long ball, Headley displayed a far more consistent and durable presence in the lineup. Headley posted batting averages of .269, .262 and .264 and only missed seven total games. In contrast, Davis batted .264, .302, and .227 in his three seasons. Additionally, Davis spent 141 days on the disabled list in 2010.

In his platform season, Headley continued an upward trend on the defensive end. Headley provided 16.5 runs above an average fielder – a stark improvement from his 2009 and 2010 campaigns. Conversely, Davis’s defensive performance has been progressively worse in each season.

Using WAR as a metric, both players contributed roughly the same value to their teams. Given the total contributions of each player prior to Super-Two eligibility, which are remarkably similar, Davis’s current value is aptly comparable to Headley’s $2.325 million contract and certainly below the $2.7 million midpoint.

c. Nick Johnson ($1.25 million arbitration award in 2004)

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45 See: Table 2.
Following the 2003 season, first baseman Nick Johnson was eligible for first time arbitration. Instead of settling on a one-year deal at or around the $1.465 million midpoint, Johnson opted for an arbitration hearing. The Expos ultimately won the arbitration hearing and Johnson was awarded $1.25 million for 2004. During his first three seasons with the New York Yankees, Johnson produced at level very similar to Davis’s past three seasons.

<table>
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<th>Table 4: Career Statistical Comparison of Ike Davis and Nick Johnson</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Davis’s power advantage is mitigated by Johnson’s ability to reach base. The players posted similar batting averages with a slight edge to Johnson. The per-game values of each player are nearly mirror images. Furthermore, Johnson (24) and Davis (25) entered first-time arbitration only a year apart in age. Adjusted for inflation, Johnson’s awarded salary in 2004 was $1.736 million. Given Davis’s additional playing time – 36.7 percent more games – his salary equates to $2.373 million. Therefore, using Johnson’s 2004 salary as a baseline measurement, Davis’s 2013 salary is appropriately valued well below the $2.7 million midpoint.

VI. Existence of Physical or Mental Defects

As mentioned previously, Davis only played in thirty-six games in the 2011 season due to a lateral sprain to his left ankle and a cartilage injury to his tibia. As a result, 141 of Davis’s accumulated 2.168 days of service time were spent on the disabled list. Although he produced

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48 Id.
49 Id.
as a promising prospect should prior to the injury, Davis has been unable to perform up to the same levels post injury.

Additionally, Davis’s splits in 2012 suggest possible mental deficiencies in handling pressure and key situations. As mentioned above, Davis produced a split of .188/.277/.342 in front of New York fans this season, a drastic drop from his road split of .262/.335/.566. Further, in key situations with RISP, Davis failed to produce with a terrible split of .214/.289/.428. Davis’s failures are even more drastic with RISP and two outs, when a hit is needed. In these situations his split was .185/.258/.407.

A similar defect in performance, and one that may truly limit his future value, is Davis’s 2012 performance against left-handed pitchers. Against lefties Davis produced a dismal split of .174/.225/.335 compared to his righties split of .253/.345/.523. Combining this inability to hit lefties with his 2012 0.7 WAR value suggests that Davis’s future value as a major leaguer is not as an everyday starter, but nothing more than a platoon/replacement player.

VII. Recent Performance of the Club

With Davis struggling while occupying such a prominent role in their lineup, it is no surprise that the Mets quickly faded from contention. In 2012 the Mets finished 74-88, fourth in the NL East division. This was the team’s worst win total since Davis’s 2010 promotion to the

51 Davis’s 2012 splits were .227/.308/.462.
52 Id at Ike Davis 2012 Splits, Baseball Reference.
53 Id.
54 Id.
55 Id.
56 A platoon player is traditionally a player that only faces a certain handed pitcher. Typically, a left-handed player such as Davis would platoon to only face right-handed pitchers.
While Davis sat on the disabled list in 2011, the Mets scored 718 runs and looked to improve upon this total in getting him back in 2012. Instead, the Mets only scored 650 runs with Davis in their everyday lineup, the team’s lowest run production since 2003. The Mets remain hopeful that Davis can regain his pre-injury form and be their everyday first-baseman of the future as the team aspires to reach the postseason, but after Davis’s 2012 season these aspirations remain nothing more than wishful thinking.

VIII. Conclusion

Davis has shown the potential to be a valuable contributor for the Mets over the past three seasons. However, there are many factors that give the Club concerns. Davis has shown a tendency for long periods of inconsistency at the plate. During the past season, Davis was a one-dimensional player with 32 home runs and little else at the plate. Additionally, once a promising defensive first baseman, Davis’s defensive skills have declined precipitously. Given the devastating effect of his 2011 knee injury and his lack of production in 2012, Davis may never regain the promise demonstrated in his rookie season. Based on the evidence provided in this brief and in oral argument, the Mets respectfully request that the arbitration panel find our offer of $2.4 million to be an appropriate salary for Davis in 2013.

58 Id.
59 Id.
60 Id.