Conor Furey | Rafael Devers, ARB-1
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Rafael Devers, Career in Context:

Rafael Devers has accumulated 3.070 years of major league service, entitling him to file for salary arbitration for the first time. Although one of the game's top young players, Devers has not put up the requisite numbers to earn a first-year arbitration salary among top-tier third basemen. Devers's year-to-year durability, a strength of his, is overshadowed by both inconsistency at the plate (35.5-point variance from his career batting average in the 2018 and 2019 seasons; Figure 2) and an unreliable glove in the field (a pro-rated career total[1] of -45 Defensive Runs Saved; Figure 1). When taking Baseball Reference's Wins Above Replacement statistic (7.0 in Devers's career) into account along with the above points, the similarities among peers Shaw, Lamb, Suárez, Álvarez, and Haniger (7.86 average) outweigh those of Machado, Arenado, Bryant, and Davis (14.43 average). To be shown below in his historical comparisons with relevant first-year arbitration-eligible players, Rafael Devers's track record through his 3.070 service years in Major League Baseball merits a 2021 salary filing amount of $4,450,000.

Figure 1: Rafael Devers, Career and Platform Year in Context

Pos	Player		Service Time	G	PA	IL		R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	SO	BB	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	ARB-1
3B	Rafael Devers		3.070	391	1680	39	1	254	254	108	74	21.0	364	117	0.279	0.332	0.498	115	-35	6.5	(midpoint goal)
		Pro-rated-Career		488	2102	39		308	327	135	93		478	139	0.276	0.327	0.495		-45	7.0	$ 4,763,200
		Platform-20		57	248	0		32	43	16	11	21.1	67	13	0.263	0.310	0.483	110	-6	0.3	
		Pro-rated-platform		154	670	0		86	116	43	30		181	35					-16	0.8	2020
Team			Service Time	G	PA	IL		R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	SO	BB	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	ARB-1
3B	T. Shaw		3.088	500	1971	0	--	251	294	101	92	18.9	436	199	0.255	0.333	0.475	111	14	11.6	$ 4,675,000
		Platform-18		150	587	0		73	86	23	32	15.6	108	78	0.241	0.345	0.480	119	9	4.2	2019
3B	J. Lamb		3.053	443	1752	48	1	223	241	80	69	22.2	440	193	0.250	0.336	0.462	105	1	5.8	$ 4,275,000
		Platform-17		149	635	0		89	105	30	30	17.9	152	87	0.248	0.357	0.487	112	-9	1.6	18
3B	E. Suarez		3.061	492	1934	0	--	240	223	78	64	26.8	463	174	0.258	0.333	0.423	101	-9	6.6	$ 3,750,000
		Platform-17		155	632	0		87	82	25	26	20.5	147	84	0.260	0.367	0.461	115	3	3.7	18
3B	P. Alvarez		3.085	470	1848	50	1	194	268	77	86	19.4	565	166	0.235	0.306	0.443	106	-23	4.6	$ 4,250,000
		Platform-13		152	614	0		70	100	22	36	15.5	186	48	0.233	0.296	0.473	115	2	3.3	14
RF*	M. Haniger		3.048	350	1499	181	2	203	189	78	62	21.3	349	143	0.267	0.348	0.480	126	13	10.7	$ 3,010,000
		Platform-19		63	283	115		46	32	13	15	16.4	81	30	0.220	0.314	0.463	108	1	1.3	20
Player			Service Time	G	PA	IL		R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	SO	BB	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	ARB-1
3B	M. Machado		3.056	451	1979	86	2	252	215	103	68	26.7	330	128	0.281	0.33	0.458	114	55	17.7	$ 5,000,000
		Platform-15		162	713	0		102	86	30	35	18.1	111	70	0.286	0.359	0.502	132	16	7.1	2016
3B *S-2	N. Arenado		2.155	399	1646	40	1	204	243	106	70	21.9	240	82	0.281	0.318	0.500	108	52	13.7	$ 5,000,000
		Platform-15		157	665	0		97	130	43	42	14.7	110	34	0.287	0.323	0.575	124	22	5.8	16
3B *S-2	K. Bryant		2.171	457	2014	0	--	319	274	104	94	18.2	481	247	0.288	0.388	0.527	142	2	19.6	$ 10,850,000
		Platform-17		151	665	0		111	73	38	29	18.9	128	95	0.295	0.409	0.537	141	-3	6.1	18
LF*	K. Davis		3.104	469	1752	37	1	236	264	87	102	15.5	444	129	0.249	0.312	0.504	120	-12	6.7	$ 5,000,000
		Platform-16		150	610	0		85	102	24	42	13.2	166	42	0.247	0.307	0.524	123	-1	2.5	17

From a big-picture standpoint, Devers is hardly the first third baseman to enter arbitration with this acumen of extra base hits. However, Devers's most relevant comps in that department (Shaw, Arenado, and Bryant) also carry with them elite plate discipline and a premium glove to go with it. Low rWAR numbers hold Devers back from a true comparison here. The following argument will address where Devers fits into this gap between these two tiers of players. When judged against comparable first-year arbitration-eligible third basemen, Rafael Devers lacks the (1) offensive consistency to qualify as an elite power-hitting corner position player and (2) the defensive tools necessary to receive a salary above the $4.763 million midpoint.

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[1] Given the uncertainty surrounding the treatment of the 2020 season in salary arbitration this offseason, preference will be given to the method of extrapolating all 2020 counting stats across a full 162-game season.

<u>Team's perspective</u>:

These following numbers paint the picture of a substandard defensive player whose platform season proved a regression to the mean in the wake of an aberrational 2019 season:

Figure 2: Rafael Devers, Consistency of Career Contributions[2]

	Year	G	PA	R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	K/PA	BB/PA	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	Awards
Rafael Devers	2017	58	240	34	30	14	10	22.2	23.8%	7.5%	0.284	0.338	0.482	112	-5	1.3	
	2018	120	490	59	66	24	21	21.4	24.7%	7.8%	0.240	0.298	0.433	94	-14	-0.1	
	2019	156	702	129	115	54	32	20.2	17.0%	6.8%	0.311	0.361	0.555	133	-10	4.9	MVP-12, GG-6
	2020	57	248	32	43	16	11	21.1	27.0%	5.2%	0.263	0.310	0.483	110	-6	0.3	
		154	670	86	116	43	30								-16	0.8	
	Career	488	2102	308	327	135	93	21.0	22.7%	6.6%	0.276	0.327	0.495	115*	-45	6.9	

One unavoidable fact on the front of offensive consistency is that Devers has only put up one full season of play four years into his career. This approach is not an attempt to penalize Devers for the unusual circumstances of the 2020 season, but rather an acceptance that we cannot fairly project Devers's performance across a full season taking only his 2019 season into account. We can concede that Devers is durable, yes; but when it comes to consistency of performance across those games that he is available, we cannot say with certainty that we know what to expect from him.

As seen above, a decline of on-base skills in his platform season could be a sign of a larger trend of regression. With walk rate and batting average each markedly down, we are looking at a player, outside of 2019, whose has reached base (.311) well below league average (.321). A low-OBP corner infielder is a vulnerable bucket when it comes to salary arbitration. On top of that, poor plate discipline in his platform year casts doubt over the sustainability of prior power numbers: a walk-to-strikeout ratio of .194 platform vs. a .391 league average in 2020 and .350 in his career up to the 2020 season. Another benchmark of power hitters, slugging percentage (the total number of bases a player records per at-bat and a usual specialty of Devers's), shows another perspective of a step back among his third base peers. In 2020, 6 Boston batters (appearing in at least half the club's games) <u>created more runs</u> than Devers this past year.

In addition to an evident decline in the usual strong suits of his position (plate discipline and creating runs), Devers has also proven to be a defensive liability at the hot corner. This is shown by both of the two most common statistical measures of defensive performance, defensive runs saved (DRS; a quantity placed on the number of runs a player saved or cost his team on defense relative to the average defender[3])—where Devers ranked 2nd to last (-6)—and ultimate zone rating (UZR; a counting stat that, like DRS, takes into account the player's arm, range, double-play capability, and avoidance of errors)—where Devers ranked last among eligible 2020 third basemen (-5.6). Devers's career DRS numbers occupy well below-average territory (-35 from 2017-20, also last among all qualified third basemen), while his UZR numbers portray a regression to the mean from a 2.7 rating in 2019 that helped garner Gold Glove votes.

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[2] 2020 counting stats highlighted in gray are extrapolated across the season to represent would-be 162-game totals.
[3] Defense | Sabermetrics Library – FanGraphs: https://library.fangraphs.com/defense/drs/

Taking into account the contribution of both his offensive and defensive performances to his overall value to his club, the all-encompassing stat of Wins Above Replacement (rWAR[4]) ranks Devers 18th among qualified third basemen across the initial years (2017-20) of his career. In his platform season, he ranked 24th among qualified 3B. Beyond a meager rWAR for players of his purported caliber, Devers does not provide as much value to his team as surface-level numbers may suggest, as shown in clutch performance and Boston performance relative to his own. To preempt the players' attempts to limit the scope of the case to Devers's offensive performance to date, we will supplement the numbers on his defensive weaknesses with a brief overview of his disappearance at the plate when his team needed him most.

First, Devers's availability has not shown a strong correlation with his team's win-loss record. In Boston's 2018 World Series campaign, Devers spent 39 days on the Injured List—an amount of time that did not seem to derail the team's performance in the win column; Boston went 80-41 (.661) with Devers on the field, and a relatively similar 28-13 (.549) in games without an appearance from Devers.

Second, Devers has come up small in the clutch moments of situational hitting. In high-leverage plate appearances—leverage increases the closer the score, the later the innings, and the more runners on base—throughout his first three full years in the league, Devers has posted a .222 batting average with 7 RBI in 19 PA, 2020 (75th); .274 with 14 RBI in 67 PA, 2019 (54th); .237 with 11 RBI in 44 PA, 2018 (128th). In situations where top sluggers are expected to drive in runs for their ballclub, Devers has fallen short. Across this timespan (2018-20, min. 90 PA), Devers has ranked 6th (.254) on his team in batting average, and registered a team-high 33 strikeouts in these situations. In another area of importance, Devers's head-to-head stats against each divisional rival's top-two starting pitchers (the most frequently rolled-out pitchers; all but one are under contract for the next 2+ years) yield a .128 average.

Team	Hand	SP	H	AB	XBH	BB	K
TBR	LHP	B. Snell	1	9	0	1	4
	RHP	T. Glasnow	3	12	0	3	7
NYY	RHP	G. Cole	0	8	0	0	3
	RHP	L. Severino*	0	12	0	1	5
	LHP	J. Montgomery	1	8	1	1	0
TOR	LHP	H. Ryu	1	4	0	0	1
	RHP	R. Stripling	1	4	0	1	1
BAL	LHP	J. Means	3	18	0	0	3
	RHP	A. Cobb	2	19	0	2	4
*scheduled return: mid-2021			12	94	1	9	28

The third, and most influential factor, is that Devers is a beneficiary of a good supporting cast. This past year, Devers's offensive performance regressed along with Boston's. His best season at the plate came with Boston's highest run output (5.56 R/G) in 2019. Frankly, Devers receives an abundance of chances due to his #2 position (designed to get him the most at-bats in 2020 and the 2nd half of 2019) in a batting order that yielded a historic amount of turnover—for example, the 2019 Red Sox sent the 2nd-most players to bat in the modern era (5770 AB).

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[4] rWAR represents Baseball Reference's calculation of a player's Wins Above Replacement. Both rWAR and FanGraph's version (fWAR) integrate weighted on-base average into their calculations for batters with the main difference, in third basemen particularly, appearing to lie in positional adjustments (+2.0 rWAR vs. +2.5 fWAR).

Devers's counting stats generally tracked both the performance of the hitters that protected him and the number of opportunities his offense afforded him. On the other hand, his underlying rate stats tell the story that he has developed into an above-average, not elite, hitter with one anomalous, not breakout, season.

Player's perspective:

Contrary to the team's arguments devaluing his on-field contributions, Rafael Devers has posted elite career power numbers and availability rate— the two areas that arbitration panels have historically rewarded—before his 24th birthday.

When it comes to doubles, Devers's career amount (108) outpaces all comps included in the case, while his pro-rated career amount (135) would place him in elite company when considering players younger than 24 in the past decade; he slots behind only Manny Machado and Mike Trout. In the past two seasons, Devers has ranked 1st and 6th in 2019 and 2020 respectively.

When it comes to home runs among his peers within the same search parameters, Devers ranks 9th (74), while his pro-rated figure (93) would place him at 6th, only slightly trailing names such as Cody Bellinger, Giancarlo Stanton, and Bryce Harper. Controlling for the shortened 2020 season, Devers's OPS+ (the sum of on-base and slugging percentages, adjusted for park factors and to the league average; useful for comparison among peers and across separate seasons) slots him at 2nd among 3B prior to their age-23 season in the past decade. A score of 115 (essentially, 15% better than league average) puts him 3 points behind Machado (118) and a staggering 18 points ahead of Nolan Arenado (97). When the leaderboard criteria is changed to include all position players (min. 1000 PA), then Devers ranks 15th, joined by some elite company the likes of Francisco Lindor (114), Christian Yelich (115), and Jason Heyward (115). These are players whose undeniable value was recognized in either franchise-altering long-term extensions or headline trades in their final year of arbitration eligibility.

To rebut the assertion that Devers's offensive performance has fluctuated year to year, we suggest that the panel look no further than Devers's rate of home runs per trip to the plate to show that 2020 was not as down of a year as the team portrays: AB/HR steadily hovers around 20 year-to-year. When it comes to fielding, Devers's resume as a recipient of Gold Glove votes in 2019 cannot be overlooked as this exceeds the fielding acumen that Jake Lamb and even Kris Bryant can offer. To go with his above-average defensive finish of 6th-place in 2019 Gold Glove voting, Devers also received MVP votes in 2019. In contrast, none of the comps provided by the team have received one vote outside of Mitch Haniger who has missed considerable time. It should not be underestimated by the panel that the nation's top sportswriters regarded Devers to be the 12th most valuable player in the American League at the age of 22.

Durability has also served Devers well. Outside of his 39 days spent on the IL in his sophomore season, Devers has been available for every game that has been played with him on the active roster in the 2017, 2019, and 2020 seasons. This record of health, and thus playing

time, has given Devers the chance to help his team where it needs him most — at third base and second in the lineup.

Another vital element to consider when properly evaluating Devers's career to date is the manager at the helm of the club. Under the tutelage of Alex Cora (2018-19), who is set to return to the Red Sox dugout in 2021, Devers experienced his top two seasons at the plate. The relationship between the two has been widely covered by the Boston press, and Cora's "father figure" role has been reported to help Devers with both strike zone awareness and infield positioning. We argue that Devers's career should be viewed within the track of these two years, taking the abbreviated 2020 season for what it was—a sample too small to draw conclusions on the trajectory of a young slugger at the top of his position group. When viewed in this 2-year outlook, Devers outpaced both Machado and Arenado, and closely resembled the consistency of another corner fielder, Khris Davis.

Rafael Devers, Historical Comps:

Travis Shaw, 3B — $4,675,000[5] (2019)

The best fit for a comparison is Travis Shaw, whose record of career and platform season statistics will provide an insightful look into how Devers stacks up against the competition.

3B	Service Time	G	PA	R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	K/PA	BB/PA	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	Awards
Devers	Pro-rated-Career	488	2102	308	327	135	93	21.0	22.7%	6.6%	0.276	0.327	0.495	115	-45	7.0	MVP-12, GG-6
T. Shaw	Career	500	1971	251	294	101	92	18.9	22.1%	10.1%	0.255	0.333	0.475	111	14	11.6	GG-7, GG-6
Devers	Pro-rated-platform	154	670	86	116	43	30	21.1	27.0%	5.2%	0.263	0.310	0.483	110	-16	0.8	
T. Shaw	Platform-18	150	587	73	86	23	32	15.6	18.4%	13.3%	0.241	0.345	0.480	119	9	4.2	GG-2

As the primary team comp, Shaw represents the ceiling of Devers's production. Besting Devers in his hallmark categories, with a perennial availability rate and an almost equal career HR total, Shaw also shines where Devers's has fallen short — in offensive consistency and defensive reliability. Shaw's steady OPS+ (2 points within each other in 2017-18 at 121 and 119) and stellar platform AB/HR rate (15.6), show he provided power and at an efficient rate. Owner of three Gold Glove nominations, including a runner-up finish in his platform year (9 DRS), Shaw also provides the above-average glove at third base that Devers lacks. At the end of the day, Shaw's well-rounded skillset returns him an rWAR (11.6) that puts him in a tier above Devers (7.0), and sets the bar with a $4,675,000 salary.

Jake Lamb, 3B — $4,275,000 (2018)

Jake Lamb provides the first of a series of comparisons who outperformed his career numbers with a strong platform season. Lamb produced an All-Star season in 2018 to the tune of 30 HR (in less PA), posting a much higher OBP and surrendering less runs than Devers at third base. Otherwise, the pair shares quite similar platform seasons at both the plate and in the field,

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[5] Shaw's and each following player's contract information found in location of Transactions | Player Page – Spotrac: https://www.spotrac.com/mlb/toronto-blue-jays/travis-shaw-14046/transactions/

and in durability – 48 (Lamb) and 39 (Devers) days spent on the IL, respectively, with both trips limited to their respective second seasons in the major leagues. At least 92% games were played by Lamb and Devers in each player's other two full seasons.

3B	Service Time	G	PA	R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	K/PA	BB/PA	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	Awards
Devers	Pro-rated-Career	488	2102	308	327	135	93	21.0	22.7%	6.6%	0.276	0.327	0.495	115	-45	7.0	MVP-12, GG-6
J. Lamb	Career	443	1752	223	241	80	69	22.2	25.1%	11.0%	0.250	0.336	0.462	105	1	5.8	
Devers	Pro-rated-platform	154	670	86	116	43	30	21.1	27.0%	5.2%	0.263	0.310	0.483	110	-16	0.8	
J. Lamb	Platform-17	149	635	89	105	30	30	17.9	23.9%	13.7%	0.248	0.357	0.487	112	-9	1.6	AS

While the player's side will likely describe Lamb as a player inferior to Devers based on career totals, a strong platform season for Lamb makes this comp particularly relevant along with the subsequent three in painting a picture that brings light to Devers's regression to his career mean in 2020.

Eugenio Suárez, 3B — $3,750,000 (2018)

Looking at the career numbers, Devers appears to have the edge over Suárez across the board outside of fielding. However, when zooming in on the pair's respective platform seasons, we see the portfolio of a player in Suárez who reached base more often, wasted less plate appearances (lower strikeout rate), and added more value at the plate (higher OPS+) and in the field (8th place in Gold Glove voting) — returning an All-Star level of rWAR.

3B	Service Time	G	PA	R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	K/PA	BB/PA	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	Awards
Devers	Pro-rated-Career	488	2102	308	327	135	93	21.0	22.7%	6.6%	0.276	0.327	0.495	115	-45	7.0	MVP-12, GG-6
E. Suarez	Career	492	1934	240	223	78	64	26.8	23.9%	9.0%	0.258	0.333	0.423	101	-9	6.6	GG-11
Devers	Pro-rated-platform	154	670	86	116	43	30	21.1	27.0%	5.2%	0.263	0.310	0.483	110	-16	0.8	
E. Suarez	Platform-17	155	632	87	82	25	26	20.5	23.3%	13.3%	0.260	0.367	0.461	115	3	3.7	GG-8

While Devers might win this comparison in aggregate—due to higher HR and RBI totals in his down year (platform season) and far more across his career (which, overall, is too much incremental offensive productivity to overlook)—this comparison goes to show how much movement a platform season can cause in first-year eligible arbitration players. A below league-average player on both offense (sub-100 OPS+) and defense (subzero DRS) going into his platform season, Suárez played his way into the conversation of his ultimate amount of $3.75M. By the same logic, a player can play his way down a tier and thus significant weight should be attached to Devers's subpar platform season.

Pedro Álvarez, 3B — $4,250,000 (2014)

Pedro Álvarez provides another comparison whose platform season, which yielded 3.3 rWAR, exceeds both his career performance to date as well as Devers's own platform performance.

3B	Service Time	G	PA	R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	K/PA	BB/PA	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	Awards
Devers	Pro-rated-Career	488	2102	308	327	135	93	21.0	22.7%	6.6%	0.276	0.327	0.495	115	-45	7.0	MVP-12, GG-6
P. Alvarez	Career	470	1848	194	268	77	86	19.4	30.6%	9.0%	0.235	0.306	0.443	106	-23	4.6	
Devers	Pro-rated-platform	154	670	86	116	43	30	21.1	27.0%	5.2%	0.263	0.310	0.483	110	-16	0.8	
P. Alvarez	Platform-13	152	614	70	100	22	36	15.5	30.3%	7.8%	0.233	0.296	0.473	115	2	3.3	SS, GG-7, AS

Like Lamb, Álvarez was rewarded for a 30+ home run platform season that earned him offensive (Silver Slugger), defensive (Gold Glove votes), and all-around award recognition (All-Star) for his 2013 performance at third base. This stat-line occupies a level above the platform season Suárez posted, and is another sign that points to the significance of a platform season when determining a player's value for the following year.

Mitch Haniger, RF — $3,010,000 (2020)

Haniger on the surface could appear to be a tricky comparison — due to extensive time shelved on the IL (115) to finish his platform season[6] — but otherwise tracks Devers's true numbers strikingly well given the shortened 2020 season. Haniger sports a spitting offensive image of Devers with an 11th place MVP finish in Platform-1 and a 2-Year track within 16 PA, 2 HR, and 3 points of OPS+ of each other:

3B v. RF	2-Year Track	G	PA	R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	K/PA	BB/PA	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	Awards
Devers	2019-20	213	950	161	158	70	43	20.4	19.6%	6.4%	0.298	0.348	0.536	127	-16	5.2	'19: MVP-12, GG-6
M. Haniger	2018-19	220	966	136	125	51	41	20.5	23.7%	10.4%	0.266	0.351	0.485	130	7	7.5	'18: MVP-12, GG-5 (RF)

Note: Devers 2020 statistics not extrapolated into 162-game totals in this example.

Haniger's low salary[7] result offers a third, and perhaps most salient, example of the movement from a platform season.

Manny Machado, 3B — $5,000,000 (2016)

The player's argument is likely to hinge on the fact that Devers's peak season of 2019 outperforms Machado's 2015 season at the plate. However, Machado's status as the first of three player's comps to have earned a top-8 finish in MVP votes in their platform season cannot be discounted — platform seasons still play a significant role in determining of first-year arbitration salaries.

3B	Service Time	G	PA	R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	K/PA	BB/PA	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	Awards
Devers	Pro-rated-Career	488	2102	308	327	135	93	21.0	22.7%	6.6%	0.276	0.327	0.495	115	-45	7.0	MVP-12, GG-6
M. Machado	Career	451	1979	252	215	103	68	26.7	16.7%	6.5%	0.281	0.330	0.458	114	55	17.7	MVP-9,AS, GG/GG-4
Devers	Pro-rated-platform	154	670	86	116	43	30	21.1	27.0%	5.2%	0.263	0.310	0.483	110	-16	0.8	
M. Machado	Platform-15	162	713	102	86	30	35	18.1	15.6%	9.8%	0.286	0.359	0.502	132	16	7.1	MVP-4,AS,GG

[6] MIN 3B/1B/OF Miguel Sanó (2019) was on track to surpass Devers's pro-rated HR career total having already secured an All-Star appearance in his third season, but ultimately his lack of durability (no season above 120 games registered ahead of ARB-1) priced him out of comparison range ($2,650,000).
[7] Fellow corner infielder BAL 1B Trey Mancini (2019) is a comp to watch here (strong power numbers and availability rate coupled with poor corner infield defense). Some game theory will be required here in the team's filing amount to ensure Devers's midpoint number does not fall under Mancini's 2019 number of $4,750,000.

The team's argument will likely have to focus on Machado's promising career trajectory (2015 jump from 10.6 to 17.7 career rWAR), culminating in an outstanding platform season, all but disqualifying him from a comparison with Devers. Machado balanced value at the plate (132 OPS+, 4th among 3B that year) with value in the field (16 DRS, 2nd that year) across a whole 162 games played. Although Devers could claim to keep the pace in doubles and RBI, the defensive contrast speaks for itself: rather than saving 16 runs at third base like Machado, Devers gave up 16 more runs than league average.

Nolan Arenado, 3B — $5,000,000 (2016); *Super-Two designation

With only 2.155 years of service under his belt, Arenado still almost doubles the rWAR that Devers brings into his first year of arbitration eligibility. Aside from exceeding Devers's platform season stats in each offensive category, Arenado turned in a campaign that earned him All-Star recognition, as well as a Silver Slugger and Gold Glove[8] (his third in three years!) awards.

3B	Service Time	G	PA	R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	K/PA	BB/PA	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	Awards
Devers	Pro-rated-Career	488	2102	308	327	135	93	21.0	22.7%	6.6%	0.276	0.327	0.495	115	-45	7.0	MVP-12, GG-6
N. Arenado	Career	399	1646	204	243	106	70	21.9	14.6%	5.0%	0.281	0.318	0.500	108	52	13.7	2xGG, ROY-7
Devers	Pro-rated-platform	154	670	86	116	43	30	21.1	27.0%	5.2%	0.263	0.310	0.483	110	-16	0.8	
N. Arenado	Platform-15 (*S-2)	157	665	97	130	43	42	14.7	16.5%	5.1%	0.287	0.323	0.575	124	22	5.8	MVP-8, SS, AS, GG

This elite award recognition, along with an incomparable RBI total and AB/HR rate, likely preclude the player's argument of Devers besting Arenado's amounts of XBH (90 for Devers in 2019 vs. Arenado's 89 in 2015) and OPS+ (133 vs. 124), in their respective top seasons. Each player paced the majors in total bases in these respective seasons. The player's will likely attempt to limit the scope of the comparison to show that under Cora (2018-19), Devers tracked the 2-year stretch of Arenado's 2014-15. The similarities stretch from oddly identical — games started (267 apiece) and doubles (78 vs. 77) — to strikingly similar — RBI (181 vs. 191) and OPS+ (117 vs. 120). As much as the player's side wants to compare that stretch at the plate, two realities center the discussion: Arenado's league-leading 34 DRS in this stretch (vs. a Devers 16th-place finish with -24 DRS) and 2020 proving to be too drastic of a regression for Devers to ignore in his overall evaluation. In closing, the defensive gap between the two players accounted for a difference of 5.1 in rWAR (4.8 vs. 9.9) across the aforementioned two-year stretches, which is the equivalent of a Carlos Correa (5.0 rWAR) or Corey Seager (5.2 rWAR) over the past two seasons.

Kris Bryant, 3B — $10,850,000 (2018); *Super-Two designation

Bryant presents an intriguing, albeit one-sided, comparison at the third base position. Bryant's career doubles and RBI are dwarfed by Devers's totals, however almost every other

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[8] Matt Chapman is another comp to watch here. As a fellow 2020 first-time eligible third baseman, Chapman has the ability (beats Devers in 2B, HR, R, OPS+, DRS) to set a benchmark for Devers. Concerns over Chapman's durability (51 days on IL, finished platform year on IL) however may prevent him from a higher number. Aaron Judge still earned $8.5M despite 129 days spent on the IL (career) leading into his first year of arb-eligibility. One additional factor to consider: Boras clients (i.e. Chapman) tend to file later in the process.

statistic tilts the balance in Bryant's favor — who did it in consistent fashion too (1-point difference between career and platform OPS+). Not only does Bryant sport a rWAR almost three times as high as Devers's, but he also bears the elite status of a player who has won both Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player within his first three seasons—joined only by Ichiro Suzuki, Fred Lynn, Cody Bellinger, Dustin Pedroia, Ryan Howard, and Cal Ripken, Jr. Neither Bellinger nor Howard, the two members of this group who qualified for salary arbitration, earned a dollar below the $10,000,000 mark. That is to say, Bryant is clearly a class above Devers.

3B	Service Time	G	PA	R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	K/PA	BB/PA	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	Awards
Devers	Pro-rated-Career	488	2102	308	327	135	93	21.0	22.7%	6.6%	0.276	0.327	0.495	115	-45	7.0	MVP-12, GG-6
K. Bryant	Career	457	2014	319	274	104	94	18.2	23.9%	12.3%	0.288	0.388	0.527	142	2	19.6	MVP,ROY, 2xAS,MVP-11
Devers	Pro-rated-platform	154	670	86	116	43	30	21.1	27.0%	5.2%	0.263	0.310	0.483	110	-16	0.8	
K. Bryant	Platform-17 (*S-2)	151	665	111	73	38	29	18.9	19.2%	14.3%	0.295	0.409	0.537	141	-3	6.1	MVP-7

The player's argument will try to focus on the similarity in XBH totals: 210 XBH in 2102 PA for Bryant vs. Devers's 206 pro-rated career total. However, Bryant's elite plate discipline and premium glove, not to mention award recognition, look to price Devers out of a comparison that has much impact on Devers's final salary amount.

Khris Davis, LF — $5,000,000 (2017)

The player's side will look to counter the team's rhetoric surrounding Devers's defense by introducing another corner fielder as a historical comparison whose below-average defense did not detract from his consistent production at the plate in his first time through arbitration. Khris Davis's mix of power output and durability (2 days on the IL under Devers's 39) in his first 3+ seasons portray a match with those of Devers to date.

Outside of the three aforementioned third basemen (whom the player side will likely concede outpaced Devers in almost all relevant categories), Khris Davis serves an apt comparison as a corner outfielder who more than made up for marginal defense with his standout power numbers. When juxtaposing their respective career numbers, Devers wins the counting stats battle by a significant margin outside of the close margin in home runs.

3B v. OF	Service Time	G	PA	R	RBI	2B	HR	AB/HR	K/PA	BB/PA	BA	OBP	SLG	OPS+	DRS	rWAR	Awards
Devers	Pro-rated-Career	488	2102	308	327	135	93	21.0	22.7%	6.6%	0.276	0.327	0.495	115	-45	7.0	MVP-12, GG-6
K. Davis	Career	469	1752	236	264	87	102	15.5	25.3%	7.4%	0.249	0.312	0.504	120	-12	6.7	GG-4 (LF)
Devers	Pro-rated-platform	154	670	86	116	43	30	21.1	27.0%	5.2%	0.263	0.310	0.483	110	-16	0.8	
K. Davis	Platform-16	150	610	85	102	24	42	13.2	27.2%	6.9%	0.247	0.307	0.524	123	-1	2.5	

A few top-of-line numbers illustrate the dissimilarity between the two players: Davis's elite AB/HR numbers in both his platform and career, Davis's higher number of total career HR, and Davis's higher OPS+ especially in his platform season. While he may trail in career runs and RBI, Davis has also received less chances at the plate. The two share starkly similar plate discipline metrics, but unlike Davis's placement in left field, Devers plays a position where teams cannot hide a plus bat and sacrifice defensive performance.

Across his first four seasons, Davis proved consistent at the plate, offering a steady flow of home runs that spikes in his platform year. While no clear breakout season like Devers's 2019, Davis provides mind-numbing consistency (.247) within an upward-trending career arc. The

player's main argument that Davis tracked Devers and his start (both three consecutive seasons with 20+ HRs) can be proven moot by the example of Evan Gattis, who was not directly rewarded for posting three (and then a fourth) consecutive seasons of 20+ HRs from 2013-16 ($3.3 M). To further break down this argument, AB/HR—an area where Davis provided ¼ more consistent pop at the plate than Devers—gives us a glimpse into Davis's superior power, and distances his comp from Devers.

Conclusion

Although a top young player at his position, Devers fails to reach the merits of a two-way third basemen like Manny Machado or Nolan Arenado. Rather, Devers falls more in line with the comparison of Travis Shaw, and the two-year track of Mitch Haniger outweighing the dependability of one with Khris Davis. When judged against comparable first-year arbitration-eligible third basemen, Rafael Devers lacks the (1) offensive consistency to qualify as an elite power-hitting corner position player and (2) the defensive tools necessary to receive a salary above the $4.763 million midpoint.