

Marcus Semien's Plate Discipline [2019 vs 2023]

Marcus Semien is no stranger to MVP seasons. He had one with the Oakland Athletics in 2019 and one with the Texas Rangers in 2023. Although he did not come out on top of the voting, he finished third in voting both times. Given his elite production in both seasons, you might expect his approach at the plate to remain consistent—but that's not the case with Semien.

In 2019, Semien posted an 11.6% walk rate and a 13.7% strikeout rate. By 2023, his walk rate had dropped to 9.6%, while his strikeout rate slightly increased to 14.6% (+0.9%). While his strikeout rate remained relatively stable, the decline in walk rate suggests a shift in approach—he became more aggressive at the plate.

Semien has frequently been used as a leadoff hitter, a role he filled in both 2019 and 2023. Typically, leadoff hitters aim to get on base and set the tone for their team. However, Semien's approach in 2023 was notably more aggressive than in 2019. His first-pitch swing rate jumped from 23% to 36.4%, indicating that in 2023 he was attacking early in counts rather than waiting to see what pitchers would throw him. This shift aligns with his zone swing rate, which increased from 66.5% to 72.9% (+6.4%). Despite this, his chase rate (swings at pitches outside the zone) only increased slightly (+2.3%), suggesting that while he was more aggressive, he still maintained strong discipline on pitches outside the strike zone.

Interestingly, his whiff rate actually decreased from 18.3% in 2019 to 18.0% in 2023 (-0.3%). This indicates that, despite swinging more, he was still making consistent contact—whether resulting in fouls, outs, or hits.

One factor that needs to be considered is the ballpark. In 2019, Semien played at the Oakland Coliseum, a pitcher-friendly park (97 Park Factor), where the spacious outfield and sides made it harder to get extra-base hits. In contrast, Globe Life Field in 2023 had a Park Factor of 102, favoring hitters more. This shift might have contributed to his increased aggressiveness, as he had more incentive to attack pitches early in the count, knowing the ballpark could work in his favor.

Ultimately, Marcus Semien has shown he can perform at an MVP level with different approaches—whether through discipline and patience at the plate (2019) or aggression and attacking the strike zone (2023).