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UPDATE: Rays win salary arbitration case with Niemann. He will earn $2.75 million rather than the $3.2 million he had been seeking. The Rays are now 6-0 in salary arbitration hearings.

On the same day that a panel of three arbitrators ruled in favor of the Washington Nationals over John Lannan in the first salary arbitration hearing of 2012, **Jeff Niemann** and the Tampa Bay Rays made salary arbitration cases before a panel comprised of arbitrators James Oldham, Howard Edelman and Mark Irvings.

Based upon history (and comps this salary arb season), Niemann is likely to lose his case.

For those that don't know, the Rays have historically gone with a "file and go" policy with players in salary arb. That is, if the player does not agree to an offer in advance of salary figures being exchanged, the Rays have said, "If you file salary figures, we intend on going all the way to hearing. We won't be negotiating after that point."

It's clearly designed as a deterrent, but there's more: those players that took the gamble and went against the Rays have lost in every case. The Rays are batting 1.000 in salary arbitration hearings going 5-0, most recently beating **B.J. Upton** in 2010 before a panel comprised of Gil Vernon, Elizabeth Neumeier, and Elliott Shriftman.

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More than history weighs on the side of the Rays with Niemann, however. Niemann was hurt from May 4 and June 20 with a strained back. That doesn't help his case.

Also, looking at this year's class of players in salary arbitration, if Niemann loses, he might have to look to the Cubs and **Chris Volstad** for the reason why.

Volstad and Niemann are good comps. They have nearly identical Major League Service Time (Volstad - 3.076, Niemann - 3.022). Volstad avoided arbitration with a 1-year, $2,655,000 deal on Jan. 17. Niemann is seeking $3.2 million while the Rays have offered $2.75 million.

Uh, oh. Here's why.

Volstad's ERA with the Marlins over 29 games was 4.89 going 5-13. Niemann was 11-7 with a 4.06 ERA in 23 starts. Wins and losses become an arguable point for the Rays with the comp as clearly the Rays were better than the Marlins last season.

Volstad's splits for ERA were identical (4.89), while Niemann was 4.95 at home and 3.27 away.

Niemann is seeking salary above average for his MLST and ERA, while his ERA of 4.06 on the wrong side of the league ERA average of 3.94.

Niemann doesn't get help from Volstad in strikeouts, as well. In 23 games, Niemann had 105 Ks. Volstad had 117 in 29 games. In other words, it's a push based on the number of games Niemann played due to that back injury, and it comes back to looking at Niemann's asking figure compared to the Rays offering number, which is higher than what Volstad settled for with the Cubs ahead of arbitration.

We can drill down deeper. On 0-1 counts Volstad had 79 Ks last season to 77 for Niemann,

another push. When the pitchers are in jams, it's the same deal: a push. Niemann struck out 12 with RISP and 2 outs. Volstad struck out 14 in the same situation.

In almost every statistical category used in salary arbitration (advanced metrics are rarely used due to arguing before arbitrators, not "baseball people"), the two are nearly identical. So, it's going to come back to that asking figure of $3.2 million compared to the Rays offering $2.75 million.

The ruling is expected to be handed down on Friday. We're going to land on the side of the Rays on this one. If so, Tampa Bay will retain their perfect record going 6-0 in salary arbitration cases.

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