

Corey Seager: 2023's Most Promising Player

Since he entered MLB, Corey Seager has been feared. An offense-first shortstop, he put up elite numbers at the plate, boasting a triple slash of .297/.367/.504 for the Los Angeles Dodgers (2015-2021). Throughout that time, no shortstop with at least 1500 PA had a higher [wRC+](#) than Seager. Simply put, [he was the best offensive shortstop in MLB](#).

Corey Seager's run from the COVID-shortened 2020 season through the 2021 season was [nothing short of dominant](#). He was injured for a large portion of the 2021 season, but he placed 2nd among shortstops and 7th among all MLB hitters in wRC+ (147) in that timeframe (min. 600 PA). This success in the box, along with his numerous accolades landed him a massive, [10 year/\\$325 million contract](#) with the Texas Rangers.

This deal seemed risky but potentially beneficial for the Rangers. Seager had, up to that point, been the best offensive shortstop in MLB, had a [massive amount of playoff experience](#), and was potentially a valuable veteran clubhouse presence for a young, rebuilding team. At the time, signing elite bats Seager and Marcus Semien ([3rd in 2021 AL MVP Voting](#)), and adding veteran SP Jon Gray to the roster seemed like optimistic moves from a struggling franchise's front office. A desperate fanbase had the hopes of a playoff berth, or at least a winning season, for [the first time since 2016](#).

As of the writing of this article, the Rangers are currently 65-87, well out of the playoff picture, in 4th place in a [top heavy AL West](#). Much of this disappointment can be attributed to the signed

free agents of the past offseason who haven't met the lofty expectations of their massive contracts.

Seager is one of those “disappointing” players, as he hasn't yet found the same level of success in Texas, struggling to a .246/.319/.457 triple slash with a 117 wRC+. Based on the fact that wRC+ is scaled with 100 as league average, his line is still worthy of praise. However, this is seemingly not the same elite hitter that Seager has proven himself to be over the span of the 2020-21 seasons. A 20% decrease in production at the plate from Seager is worrisome for fans and coaches alike. As he nears his 30s, it would be easy to fear his contract turning into a [Pujols-esque disaster](#).

Yet, Seager is poised to go above and beyond what he has achieved so far in his career, potentially passing the levels of production put up in his 2020-2021 run.

The thing is, Seager's numbers *are* elite this year. They're just not the numbers everybody is looking at. His 4.4 fWAR ranks 7th among shortstops, but [shortstop is one of the most talented positions in the league](#). Fangraphs evaluates Seager as worth \$34.9 million in player value this season, higher than what he is currently being paid per year.

Beneath the surface, Seager isn't just a top shortstop in the league. [He's a top hitter in MLB](#). His average exit velocity of 91.3 MPH is in the 86th percentile in MLB; his HardHit% of 45.8 is in the 80th percentile; Barrel% of 10.3: 70th percentile; K% of 15.2: 87th percentile. Seager's average launch angle of 13.5° is considered the launch angle for line drives, which paired with

his elite exit velocity should lead to massive success for hitters. This *prospective* formula for success is exemplified by Seager's expected triple slash line: .285/.355/.511. That expected triple slash line, paired with a .374 xwOBA, signifies that Seager *should* be a top ten hitter in MLB this season.

It does a disservice to Seager by saying that this season is a down year for him. If anything, this season has just been [incredibly unlucky](#). Seager has the highest difference in MLB between xBA and BA, the 7th highest between xSLG and SLG, and the third highest between xwOBA and wOBA.

But why is Seager getting so unlucky? A game as scientific and statistically driven as baseball doesn't let a player's "luck" determine the course of their 162 game season. At some point, they will regress to their mean. However, differing factors can change each player's individual "mean" that they inevitably reach.

To put it lightly, the shift has been Seager's kryptonite this season. Seager pulls 41.6% of batted balls this season, with those pulled balls resulting in ground balls 58.8% of the time. Seager pulls a ground ball 24.4% of the time. However, Seager has always done this, or something similar to it, so why should it matter?

Because other teams have caught on. In 2020, teams shifted against Seager 72.8% of the time. In 2022, that number was raised to 92.5%. Pulled ground balls into the shift, no matter how hard they're hit, are disastrous for hitters.

Luckily for Seager, he won't have to worry about defenses shifting in 2023, as the Joint Competitive Committee [has recently voted](#) for rule changes to enhance the fan experience with those changes including the implementation of a pitch clock, wider bases, and notably, the ban of defensive shifting.

This ban will benefit Seager, but to what extent? Well, in 2022, Corey Seager's triple slash for the 192 PA that have resulted in ground balls is an atrocious .156/.156/.156. Before teams started heavily applying shifts on Seager (2015-2019), his triple slash through [636 PA resulting in ground balls](#) was .250/.250/.275. If Seager saw that sort of production on ground balls, his triple slash line this year would be .279/.338/.492. However, Seager wasn't hitting the ball as hard then as he is now (90.1 MPH vs 91.3 MPH average exit velocity), which means that his success on ground balls would likely be better than it previously was.

However, [Seager's main flaw throughout his career](#) has been his fielding, and this shift ban won't address that. Fortunately for him and his organization, [Seager has seemingly become an above average fielder overnight](#). His OAA has skyrocketed from -5 OAA to +4 OAA from 2021-2022. DRS doesn't back him up, but it's still a step in the right direction for a once notoriously stone-handed fielder.

Seager might not reach MVP level next season, but he will surely see better results than he did this year. Seager, among others, will benefit greatly from the shift ban, and it will be intriguing to see who reaps the rewards of this rule change most. However, Seager hasn't seen much on-field

resistance throughout his career, and after signing a massive contract and struggling (compared to his previous performance), he will have something to prove going into next March. In 2023, Seager's possible offensive dominance combined with his defensive improvements could easily catapult him back into the conversation of the best shortstop in MLB. Watch Seager closely, and don't be shocked if you see his name mentioned frequently come awards season.