



Like most Indians fans, I have spent the majority of this season being frustrated with Asdrubal Cabrera. The subject of plenty of trade talks this past offseason, Cabrera is having one of the worst seasons of his career at the most inopportune time. Not only has his performance negatively affected an Indians team that is in contention for a playoff spot, but it would seem to have lowered his trade value.

A little over a month ago, I [looked at Asdrubal Cabrera's plate discipline statistics](#) and noticed that he was chasing more pitches outside the zone and taking too many pitches in the zone. I pointed to that being the chief problem with Cabrera's season and that may still be the case. But, while digging a little bit deeper, I found another thing that has hampered Cabrera this season, and it's definitely not his fault.

Baseball is a game of skill, but it's also a game of luck. For a hitter, once he makes contact with the ball, it's out of his hands. For a pitcher, once the ball leaves his hand, he no longer has any control over the situation. A fielder either catches the ball or it lands for a hit. Part of Cabrera's problem has certainly been on the skill side, with declining plate discipline and poor pitch recognition. Sagging confidence has likely played a part in his struggles.

There's more to it than that. As I noted in my post back on July 13, Cabrera's line drive rate was actually rather impressive. When he was making contact, he was barreling up the ball. Upon further review, Cabrera's line drive rate is actually the highest of his career at 25.8 percent, yet his batting average is the lowest of his career. This seems counter-intuitive. The harder you hit a ball, the more likely it is to go for a hit. The league batting average on line drives over the last 10 seasons has a range of .689 to .738, with .689 being this season's league average. In a given year, somewhere around 70 percent of line drives will go for hits.

This season, Asdrubal Cabrera's batting average on line drives is just .587. That ranks 180th out of 184 qualified hitters in Major League Baseball.

If you've watched closely over the last month or so, you've seen the visual evidence of Cabrera's bad luck. He has hit numerous balls right on the screws and they've harmlessly landed in a fielder's glove. Cabrera's career batting average on line drives is .737. He entered this season with a .764 career mark on line drives. From 2007-12, a .764 mark ranks 10th on the list among qualified players. One could make a case for regression since that's well above the league average, but it's not really a stat that you would look for regression in, certainly not a regression of nearly 200 points.

Up until this season, Cabrera hit a line drive every 6.1 at bats, as classified by Baseball Info Solutions. This season, Cabrera is hitting a line drive every 5.1 at bats. When he does make contact and put the ball in play, he's clearly hitting it well, which makes this season particularly frustrating for both Cabrera and the Indians.

While Cabrera has had his flaws this season, and also dealt with a quad injury throughout the first half, he has also gotten pretty unlucky when he has put the ball in play. His balls-in-play sample size percentage is the smallest of his career because of the spike in strikeouts, but we can project against his pre-2013 numbers to see how much of a difference it would make if Cabrera's luck was still the same.

If Cabrera's batting average on line drives was at his pre-2013 career average of .763, he would have 13 more hits, raising his batting average to .271, just two points off of his career .273 mark. If Cabrera was at league average, which, for this season is .689, he would have eight more hits, for a batting average of .258.

We cannot determine what value an additional 8-to-13 hits would produce for Cabrera, because that's entirely dependent on the context of his at bat. It's safe to assume that it should mean at least a few more RBI and a few more runs scored. As we've seen as well, Cabrera has been more emotional this season than in years past and hitting the ball hard and having nothing to show for it is exceptionally frustrating. A few more hits here and there could greatly improve Cabrera's morale and confidence, leading to more productivity, less aggression in the batter's box, and a calmer approach at the plate. Those are hypothetical, but ask any hitter about how

much confidence means and he'll have a lot to say about it.

It's comforting to know that Cabrera's batting average would be around his career mark, in spite of the strikeouts, if his batting average on line drives was in line with his career average. Suffice to say, this is another example of why sabermetricians and front offices around the league put more value in on-base percentage than they do batting average. While batting average is a large component of on-base percentage, walks don't take the benefit of luck to create a baserunner.

Furthermore, because this was such a sharp decline of a pretty consistent statistic for Cabrera prior to this season, it gives hope for a bounceback season in 2014. Along with playing in a contract year, which seems to lead to better numbers for a lot of hitters, the only thing has truly changed for Cabrera is the increase in strikeouts and a fresh slate and a less unlucky 2014 campaign should help with that.