

## **Is Scott Kingery, the future second baseman of the Philadelphia Phillies?**

By John Yarusinsky

### **Intro**

The Philadelphia Phillies are in the middle of a rebuild and everyone knows it. The process began in 2012 under former General Manager Ruben Amaro Jr. and since his departure in 2014, the construction has continued under the new sheriff in town, Matt Klentak. From 2012-2015, Baseball America ranked the Phillies farm system no better than 22nd in all of minor league baseball. In 2016, however, the Phillies had the 8th best system going into the season. There's certainly no shortage of talent coming down the pipeline. Catcher Jorge Alfaro, acquired in the Cole Hamels trade is destined to be the catcher of the future. Pitchers Aaron Nola and Vincent Velasquez are expected to be two main rotation options for years to come. Jake Thompson and Zach Eflin are second tier arms the Phillies are high on, with both seeing big league time. Shortstop J.P. Crawford and outfielder Nick Williams are struggling; however, they're expected to be play integral roles going forward. Speedy outfielder Roman Quinn is getting important at bats at AAA Lehigh. Mickey Moniak the 2016 1st overall draft pick is off to a hot start in Lakewood, along with pitcher Adonis Medina. First baseman Rhys Hoskins was a masher at Double-A Reading last season and he hasn't skipped a beat. Enter Scott Kingery, second baseman for the Reading Fightin' Phils.

Kingery, selected 48th overall in the second round of the 2015 MLB First Year Player Draft out of Arizona University, was assigned to Low-A Lakewood after the draft and hit .250/.314/.337 in 66 games. The smooth-fielding Kingery also finished the season with a .986 fielding percentage and his range factor of 4.26 (metric that determines defensive efficiency) was more than encouraging. Kingery was named the Phillies 10th best prospect in the system by season's end. The Phillies decided that Kingery was ready for High-A Clearwater of the Florida State League and after 94 games, he finished the 2016 minor league season at Double A Reading. Across 131 games, Kingery did it all. The Arizona product hit .281/.335/.388 by racking up 44 extra base hits, stole 30 bases and dazzled in the field with a .980 percentage and accrued a 4.21 range factor. Although Kingery fell to 13th overall in the Phillies system via MLB pipeline, Kingery's consistency and durability proved he was a true gamer.

So, here we are in 2017. What has Kingery been up to, you ask? Well, through 17 games, I'll let the numbers do the talking. His slash line of .277/.385/.631 is something you'd see in *MLB The Show* on Playstation. In his previous 197 games as a professional, Kingery only hit 8 home runs. Guess what? He leads the Eastern League with 6 long balls and he's first in runs scored as well. In 58 total chances at second base, Kingery has a .1000 fielding percentage. Granted 17 games is a small sample size, so you might be asking, what does this scorching hot start mean? Is Scott Kingery the real deal? Is the uptick in power legitimate? Will general manager Matt Klentak trade Cesar Hernandez to make room for Kingery sooner, rather than later? Before we can answer these questions, let's dive into the numbers.

## Splits

Here is a breakdown of Kingery's offensive splits from 2015-present:

Splits	2015 (Low-A)	2016 (High-A)	2016 (AA)	2017 (AA) *
LHP	.323	.383	.206	.143
RHP	.226	.257	.262	.341
RISP	.254	.193	.222	.368
AHC	.385	.341	.406	.350
BHC	.154	.306	.231	.207

\*17 games

Legend:

RHP- Right handed pitching

LHP- Left handed pitching

RISP: Runners in scoring position

AHC: Ahead in the count

BHC: Behind in the count

A few good things to note here:

1. In 2017, Kingery is destroying right handed pitching when he's been statistically average in the past.
2. He's hitting much better with runners in scoring position.
3. As always, Kingery attacks the baseball when ahead in the count

A few bad things to note here:

1. Kingery is still struggling against left handers when he should be creaming them.
2. When Kingery is behind in the count, he's a goner.

So, you might be asking, "What does this all mean?" Let's explore, shall we?

## Analysis

It's no secret that First Energy Stadium in Reading, PA, is a hitters park. In 2016, Reading scored a 1.072 in run production on a 0 to 1 scale, with 1 being a perfect run. Anything over 1 is considered a hitter's park, whereas anything below is a pitcher's park. Here's the data on league park factors:

### Eastern League 2016: 3.96 ERA 94 AVGR

Team	R	HR	H
Portland	1.173	0.887	1.093
New Hampshire	1.156	1.100	1.147
Altoona	1.127	0.815	1.101
Bowie	1.097	1.289	1.032
Reading	1.072	1.526	1.030
Harrisburg	1.056	1.309	0.990
Binghamton	0.973	0.968	0.984
Akron	0.945	0.891	0.965
Erie	0.920	0.870	1.003
Richmond	0.877	0.652	0.897
Trenton	0.871	0.934	0.931

Also of note, Reading lead the league with a 1.526 home run rate. Is Kingery's blazing offensive start legitimate in 2017, or are his numbers padded because he plays in a hitter's park?

Venue	Games	HR	SO	AVG
Home	7	3	8	.222
Away	10	3	10	.316

As you can see, Kingery is hitting better on the road, away from the hitter friendly First Energy Stadium. That's good! So, who did the Fightin' Phils play thus far on the road? Did Kingery play in hitter friendly parks? The answer is yes. The Fightins' have played in Portland, New Hampshire, Harrisburg and Richmond. Three out of the four teams play in hitter friendly ballparks, given last year's data. For now, Kingery's hot start is encouraging; however, the jury is still out on whether or not it's legitimate.

## Sabermetrics

Alas, this is the 21st century, folks! So far we have analyzed the basics. Now it's time to put Kingery under the microscope. What kind of player is Kingery? Is he an empty .280 hitter, or will he maintain or even develop more power? Does he make solid contact? When factoring other ways to reach base, what does Kingery's stats look like? How many runs does Kingery truly create against the league average? Let's attempt to answer all of these! Here are Kingery's sabermetrics from 2015-present:

YEAR	wRC+	BABIP	SecA	ISO	GPA	wOBA
2015	88	.287	.198	.087	.150	.306
2016*	128*	.334*	.261*	.117*	.181*	.361*
2017~	183~	.293~	.569~	.333~	.260~	.444~

\*94 games with Clearwater

~17 games with Reading

Okay, it's not as bad as it looks. Let me explain!

**Weighted Runs Created+ (wRC+):** attempts to explain a player's run production, while controlling for park effects, against the league average. Given 100 is average, Kingery in 2017 means 83 more runs to the Fightin' Phils than the league average. Typically a greater sample size is needed (more games played); however this hot start **trends towards excellent** considering Kingery meant 28 more runs to Clearwater in 2016 and 12 runs less to Lakewood the year before. Anything over 100 is good to excellent.

**Batting Average on Balls in Play (BABIP):** attempts to gauge the effectiveness of the hitter. It measures how often non home runs balls fall for hits (single, double, triple). Basically, it's the player's batting average readjusted against the opposing defense while controlling for park effects. As it stands right now, Kingery is hitting .277. As you can see, Kingery scored a .293 in BABIP. A greater sample size is also needed (more balls need to be put in play) because this stat **trends towards poor**. The best players average between .320 and .350.

**Secondary Average (SecA):** measures a player's batting average beyond their normal average. This metric factors in walks, total bases, hits, stolen bases, caught stealing, divided by total at bats. This calculation attempts to discover whether or not a fringe hitter (let's say .260) is just that with a bunch of singles, or much more. From 2014-16 the average SecA for major leaguers was .251. As you can see over the past two seasons, **Kingery trends towards excellent.**

**Isolated Slugging Percentage (ISO):** is the player's slugging percentage, subtracted from his batting average. It gives us an idea on whether or not a player is an "empty" singles hitter, or an extra base hit machine. The best players have ISO's near .200 with the worst being around .120 or below. **Kingery trends towards excellent** on this as well. From his debut in 2015, Kingery's uptick in power looks legitimate. More games are needed, but this is beyond encouraging.

**Gross Production Average (GPA):** is an estimated guess of a hitter's overall ability when controlling for park effects. This metric factors in on base percentage, average run production and slugging percentage; divided by the average number of at bats per game (four). GPA's of .150 to .200 are good to excellent. Kingery **trends towards excellent** on this metric as well.

**Weighted on base Average (wOBA):** is defined as a metric used for treating hits differently, as opposed to treating them equal. For example, batting average treats all hits equally. If you get 2 hits in 4 at bats it means you're a .500 hitter. wOBA includes other ways of reaching base such as walks, dropped third strike and hit by pitch to reflect a better offensive value. The best wOBA's are between .350 & .400. In the past two seasons Kingery **trends towards excellent** on this as well.

## Analysis

Kingery **trends towards excellent** on five of the six sabermetrics tested. You might be asking, "What in the heck is up with his poor BABIP?" Let's not fret too long. I offer some explanations!

1. Small sample size
2. High strikeout rate
3. Defense is simply robbing hitters

It takes about 800 balls put in play to effectively gauge BABIP. Kingery has only played 17 games in 2017. Kingery's strikeout rate is up 5% from his 2015 total of 15.2%, so he's putting less balls in play. It's doubtful Kingery is getting robbed on any balls put in play, given his incredibly high ISO. Not to worry, it's simply too early in the season.

## Conclusion

Given the standard ways to gauge player effectiveness and sabermetrics, Kingery could be the future second baseman of the Phillies, but not right now. The incumbent for the Phillies, Cesar

Hernandez, is only getting better. Let's briefly compare a few sabermetrics. Here is how Hernandez has fared, based on three metrics from 2014-present:

YEAR	wRC+	BABIP	wOBA
2014	61	.321	.257
2015	92	.342	.306
2016	108	.363	.335
2017	135*	.400*	.379*

Hernandez hasn't skipped a beat. Also, he's not eligible for free agency until 2021 and given his offensive production and bargain of a salary (\$2.5 mil in 2017), the Phillies can afford to keep Hernandez around for years to come. Unless Hernandez is traded for pitching, Kingery will be blocked.

So, for now, Phillies fans will need to be patient and watch Kingery develop. The uptick in power is encouraging. Kingery can steal his fair share of bases. Kingery creates runs. He gets on base. Historically, he doesn't strikeout a ton. He's a great defender. Kingery, put simply, is a flashy second baseman who is a true gamer. I expect him to get traded, but for now, Kingery is doing his thing.