

CONTACT CLIFF SERIES · PLAYER TO WATCH

KEVIN MCGONIGLE

A Chance to Watch the Contact Cliff in Real Time — Not a Verdict

By Dylan Allread | Analytical and writing support by [Anthropic's Claude](#) | July 9 2026
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A note before you read this: Kevin McGonigle is a rookie having a very good season. Nothing in this piece is a prediction that he will decline, and the sample behind the Contact Cliff framework is still small — a handful of comparable career-year-one profiles, not hundreds. This is us flagging a pattern worth watching, in public, before we know how it turns out. We hope he proves it wrong.

Kevin McGonigle is having an excellent rookie season. That's not in question, and nothing below should be read as a knock on him. What we're doing here is different: documenting, in public and with a timestamp, a profile that resembles a pattern we've seen before in a small number of other hitters — so that whatever happens next, happens on the record rather than in hindsight.

That distinction matters. Almost everything else in the Contact Cliff series has been built backward — looking at hitters whose production already changed and asking whether the framework explains it. That's useful, but it's also the kind of analysis that can bend to fit whatever already happened. This one is the opposite: a specific, dated, falsifiable observation, made before the outcome is known. Either the pattern holds over the next couple of seasons or it doesn't, and there's no way to rewrite this afterward to make it look like we knew.

WHERE HE STANDS RIGHT NOW

McGonigle's CC Score is 46.6 — elevated, but below the 50-point line the trajectory data associates with the highest-confidence cases. His full-season wOBA, computed directly from Statcast pitch-by-pitch data through July 8, is .387, which happens to sit in the production bracket where, among the handful of comparable hitters we have, the follow-on year tended to be rougher rather than better. We want to be careful with that stat: it's drawn from a small number of career-year-one profiles across a three-year window, not a large, settled sample. Read it as a pattern, not a rule.

CC SCORE

46.6

2026 WOBA

.387

BAT SPEED, SLOW PITCHES

67.5 mph

BAT SPEED, HARD PITCHES

70.3 mph

The part of his profile that reads as an early signal rather than noise is the contact-point spread: roughly 8 inches between how far out front he meets a slow pitch versus a hard one. That gap has moved around within the season rather than sitting still — narrower in some months, wider in others — which is exactly what an early-stage, not-yet-settled habit looks like. It could tighten back up on its own. It could keep drifting. One rookie season isn't enough to know which.

THE NEW PIECE: TWO SIGNALS, MOVING IN THE SAME DIRECTION BUT NOT IN LOCKSTEP

We have two independent, real measurements for McGonigle's rookie season: his month-by-month batter's-box depth, and contact point computed directly from Baseball Savant's pitch-by-pitch data (1,173 pitches, March 26 through July 8, 2026). The production numbers below (wOBA, hard-hit rate, whiff rate, bat speed) are also computed directly from that same pitch-level file, not estimated.

2026	Box Depth (Y)	Contact Point (in.)	wOBA	Hard-Hit%	Whiff%	Bat Speed
April*	28.4	36.9	.446	45.5%	12.1%	69.9 mph
May	28.2	34.6	.289	37.7%	12.0%	70.1 mph
June	29.8	33.9	.402	36.2%	13.9%	70.4 mph
July	29.7	31.7	.382	37.5%	10.3%	69.6 mph
2026 Season	—	—	.387	40.2%	12.5%	—

**Contact-point and production figures for April include his final five games of March, his season debut window, folded in because that stretch alone is only 17 plate appearances.*

Both measurements move in a concerning overall direction across the season: box depth sat around Y=28.3 in April and May, then shifted back to roughly Y=29.75 in June and July, about 1.45 inches in the direction the framework treats as the risk direction. Contact point declined every single month without exception, from 36.9 inches in April down to 31.7 in July — a real 5.2-inch drift, confirmed at the weekly level too, not just an artifact of how the months are grouped.

What we won't do is pretend these two numbers are telling the identical story in lockstep, because they aren't. His single biggest box-position move, the 1.6-inch shift back in June, came with his *smallest* single-month contact-point change of the season (-0.7 inches). His biggest single-month contact-point drop, in July (-2.2 inches), came with almost no box-position change at all. These are related concepts — where a hitter stands and where he actually meets the ball — but they are clearly not the same measurement, and a month-by-month reader trying to line them up perfectly will be disappointed. What holds up is the season-level direction on both: he's sitting further back than he did in April and May, and he's making contact closer to his body than he did in April, regardless of which month you blame for which part of it.

Production is noisier and doesn't track either trend cleanly. wOBA dipped hard in May (.289) and recovered in June and July without the box position or contact point recovering alongside it — production came back some while both process measurements kept moving the same direction they'd been moving. Bat speed stayed essentially flat, oscillating in a narrow 69.6-70.4 mph band with no clear trend of its own.

So here's the honest state of it: two independently real, differently-measured signals both point the same direction across the season — back, and closer to the body — even though they don't move together on a month-by-month basis. Production hasn't followed either one down in any simple way yet. Four months is also not a long window for the mechanism this series describes; every comparable case — Arraez, Kwan, McNeil, Altuve — developed over multiple seasons, not one. A hitter's production lagging behind a process drift for four months doesn't mean the drift is harmless; it may just mean four months isn't long enough for the rest of the picture to catch up, if it's going to at all.

THE COMPARABLES, WITH THE CAVEATS LEFT IN

Four veteran cases sit in a similar starting range to McGonigle's current profile: Arraez, Kwan, McNeil, and Altuve. We're naming them again here not as proof, but as the honest basis for why this pattern gets attention at all.

Arraez entered the bat-tracking era around CC 61.5 with a wOBA near .369; his production compressed over the next two seasons and his bat speed has not recovered. Kwan's story is the cleanest single case in the whole series — three years drifting forward with solid production, then a sharp reversal back in 2026, the same year his numbers fell off. McNeil actually recovered for two seasons before the pattern reasserted itself in year four, which is the honest reminder that even a real recovery can be fragile. Altuve shows the slow version: no dramatic single-year collapse, just a steady year-over-year widening of the same gap alongside a steady decline.

McGonigle's bat speed, at 69.5 mph, hasn't shown any decline yet. He has more room to fall than Arraez did at the same stage, but he also has more room to simply not go there. Both are true at once, and we don't know which one wins.

WHAT WOULD ACTUALLY TELL US SOMETHING

Rather than framing this as two hard-coded outcomes, here's what we're actually going to watch for, stated in advance:

SIGNS THE PATTERN IS DEEPENING

Box position continuing to sit back or drift further in 2027 · contact point continuing to decline rather than leveling off · CC Score climbing toward or past 50 · wOBA and hard-hit rate failing to recover even as the season goes on

SIGNS HE'S AVOIDING IT

Box position moving forward again in 2027 · contact point stabilizing or moving back out · CC Score flat or falling · production and hard-hit rate holding independent of where either process measurement settles

The earliest real checkpoint is April 2027 — the first full month of year two, when we'll have an actual year-over-year comparison instead of a single rookie season to go on. Nothing before that point is a confirmed trend either way, including everything in this piece.

WHY WE'RE PUBLISHING THIS NOW, CAUTIOUSLY

We could wait until we know how this turns out and write it up with the benefit of hindsight. We're not doing that on purpose. A pattern that only gets named after it's already happened isn't a very useful pattern — anyone can explain a decline after the fact. The only way to actually test whether this framework means anything is to say, in public, before the outcome is known: here's a player, here's why the profile concerns us, here's exactly what we'd need to see to consider the concern confirmed or resolved.

So to be direct about what this is and isn't. This is not a forecast that Kevin McGonigle's production is going to fall. It's not a claim that he's doing anything wrong. It's a flag on a specific, narrow archetype — the rare, elite bat-to-ball hitter who keeps optimizing for contact at the plausible cost of contact quality — and an honest acknowledgment that his early profile and his recent positional drift both sit on the side of that pattern we'd rather he wasn't on.

We hope he doesn't follow it. A recovery, or better yet, a hitter who never shows the pattern clearly enough to worry about in the first place, is a genuinely good outcome and we'd be glad to

say so. We'll keep watching and report back, whichever way it goes.

This piece will be revisited at the April 2027 and mid-season 2027 checkpoints described above, using the same public methodology, regardless of outcome.

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THE BOX →

The Hitting Spectrum Series | By Dylan Allread | July 9 2026

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