Part 3 of The Hitting Spectrum Series

This Is The Place

A Unified Framework for the Mechanically Perfect Hitter

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MLB & MiLB data: baseballsavant.mlb.com | Stance data: baseballsavant.mlb.com/visuals/batting-stance

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The first piece in this series introduced the Contact Cliff: elite contact hitters whose bat-to-ball skill becomes so refined that it subconsciously decelerates their swing, drains their power, and sends them over the edge of productive performance. The second introduced The Steeps: power hitters whose swing plane becomes so vertical that offspeed pitches exploit the hole beneath their hands, hollowing out production despite healthy underlying tools.

Both are failure modes. Both are driven by behavioral drift. Both are invisible to the conventional metrics the sport uses to evaluate hitters. And both, it turns out, are opposite ends of the same spectrum.

This Is The Place is what lives between them.

Two Failure Modes, One Spectrum

Think of hitting mechanics as a single axis with two cliff edges.

On the left edge is the Contact Cliff. A hitter too willing to find the ball. Hands too active. Swing too flat and too steerable. Contact rate climbing. Power draining. The hands have learned to guide the barrel to any pitch in any location, which sounds like skill and functions like a trap.

On the right edge is The Steeps. A hitter too committed to elevation. Swing plane too vertical. Attack angle too high. Hard contact happening but not consistently enough because the plane creates a systematic hole on pitches below the zone. The brain has learned that going up produces home runs, and it has gone up too far.

Between those two edges is a zone where the swing is committed without being manipulative, aggressive without being steep, making hard contact without reaching, and whiffing on pitches that deserve to be whiffed on rather than clipping everything weakly into the infield.

That zone is the This Is The Place. And for the first time, we can measure who is in it.

The Algorithm

This Is The Place Score combines the Contact Cliff Score and The Steeps Score into a single composite metric, then adjusts for actual production to identify hitters whose mechanics are sustainably efficient rather than just technically clean.

The Contact Cliff Score (0 to 100, higher is worse) measures four inputs: bat speed deficit relative to career-era league average, contact skill inversion with low strikeout rate and low whiff rate treated as risk factors, power drain via ISO and hard hit rate, and contact point extension relative to league average. A high score means the hitter is showing behavioral drift toward the cliff.

The Steeps Score (0 to 100, higher is worse) measures four inputs: attack angle above league average, contact failure via high whiff and K rates, production running below expected output, and rate of swings in the ideal attack angle window. A high score means the hitter is showing behavioral drift toward the steeps.

The combined penalty is the sum of both scores. A hitter who scores 0 on both is mechanically ideal in every dimension the framework can measure.

The production reward adjusts for actual wOBA above league average. A hitter whose mechanics are clean and who is producing elite outcomes gets additional credit, confirming that the mechanical cleanliness is translating to results rather than just looking good in aggregate data.

This Is The Place Score is the combined penalty minus the production reward. Lower is better. A negative score means the hitter is producing so well that their output more than compensates for any minor mechanical imperfections.

Applied to all 496 qualified 2026 MLB hitters, the This Is The Place Score correlates with OPS at r=-0.587 and wOBA at r=-0.568, both statistically significant at p less than 0.001. The combined algorithm explains roughly 34% of the variance in OPS across the full hitter population using only mechanical inputs. That exceeds the predictive power of bat speed alone (r=0.257), exit velocity alone (r=0.395), and hard hit rate alone (r=0.441) as individual correlates of wOBA. The combination of two independent failure mode scores produces a stronger predictor than any single physical measurement the sport currently tracks.

What Makes This Different

OPS, wRC+, wOBA, and xwOBA are all outcome metrics. They measure what happened or what the contact quality predicts should happen. They are descriptive. They tell you where a hitter is.

This Is The Place Score is a mechanical health metric. It measures the conditions under which production happens. It tells you whether the swing mechanics are sustainably positioned to continue producing or whether one or both failure modes are quietly forming underneath output that currently looks fine.

The most powerful use case is as a leading indicator rather than a current state measurement.

A hitter with a high OPS and a deteriorating This Is The Place Score is a sell signal. The production is real but the mechanics are drifting toward a failure mode. The cliff or the steeps is forming underneath numbers that still look good. Historical data shows these collapses arrive

suddenly once the behavioral drift is deeply grooved. This Is The Place Score flags the drift before the collapse.

A hitter with a low OPS and a clean This Is The Place Score is a buy signal. The mechanics are healthy. The production failure is coming from something external: pitch mix exploitation, BABIP variance, injury, sample size. The underlying swing is not the problem. When those external factors normalize, the production should follow.

This is the first publicly derived framework that separates mechanical health from production outcomes for every qualified hitter in baseball simultaneously.

The Top of the Leaderboard

Jackson Chourio scores -4.0, the best This Is The Place Score in baseball. Contact Cliff Score of 5.5 confirms healthy bat speed and committed swing mechanics with real power production. Steeps Score of 0.0 confirms controlled swing plane with a whiff rate and K rate well within healthy range. He is producing at .372 wOBA with 46.9% hard hit rate and 73.0 MPH bat speed. He is 20 years old. The most mechanically perfect hitter in baseball by this measure is in the first years of what should be a long productive career if the mechanics hold.

Randy Arozarena scores -1.7. CC Score of 2.9, Steeps Score of 2.7. Essentially zero drift in either direction. Producing at .357 wOBA with 42.8% hard hit rate. A hitter whose swing sits almost exactly at the mechanical midpoint the framework is designed to identify.

Nathaniel Lowe scores 0.3. CC Score 5.6, Steeps Score 1.2. Hard hit rate of 42.1%, wOBA of .352. A hitter who rarely appears in conversations about the game's best players but whose mechanics are the third cleanest in baseball by this measure.

Endy Rodriguez scores 2.2. CC Score 0.0, Steeps Score 13.5. He carries slightly more steep risk than the top two, but his production at .384 wOBA confirms the swing is delivering results. He is 23 years old with mechanics that a hitter twice his age would envy.

Jake Bauers scores 7.8. CC Score 0.0, Steeps Score 17.5. Hard hit rate of 53.8% with controlled cliff metrics. His steeps score reflects slightly above average attack angle, but his 74.6 MPH bat speed and .373 wOBA suggest the power is translating cleanly into outcomes.

The Most Interesting Cases

The leaderboard contains names that will surprise anyone who consumes baseball primarily through conventional metrics. Ryan Jeffers of the Twins scores 10.2 with a .407 wOBA and 43.6% hard hit rate. Seiya Suzuki scores 13.3. Christian Walker scores 13.5. Jordan Walker scores 13.7 with a 51.3% hard hit rate and 77.2 MPH bat speed that suggests significant upside still being developed.

What these hitters share is not fame or name recognition. They share mechanically efficient swings that neither drift toward contact manipulation nor toward excessive steepness. They make hard contact without reaching. They miss pitches they should miss rather than clipping everything weakly. Their bat speed is healthy. Their attack angle is controlled. Their production is in line with or exceeds their expected output.

This Is The Place framework identifies these hitters before their numbers do. A player who enters the leaderboard with a clean This Is The Place Score while their OPS is mediocre deserves attention. The mechanics are telling a different story than the surface stats.

The Warning Signs

The framework is equally useful in the other direction. Hitters whose This Is The Place Score is deteriorating are showing mechanical drift before production collapses.

The Contact Cliff piece documented how Kevin McGonigle, the Tigers' All-Star in year one of his career, is already showing Contact Cliff fingerprints at the same career stage as Steven Kwan. His CC Score of 46.6 combined with a clean Steeps Score produces a combined penalty that is not yet in dangerous territory. But the trajectory matters. If his CC Score climbs toward 60 over the next two seasons while his Steeps stays clean, the This Is The Place Score will flag the drift before anyone is talking about a decline.

The same logic applies to Vladimir Guerrero Jr., whose CC Score of 50.5 reflects genuine cliff risk despite a hard hit rate of 44.3%. His Steeps Score is moderate. His This Is The Place is already outside the ideal range. A hitter with his tools should be producing at an elite level. The mechanical drift is suppressing production that his exit velocity suggests should be there.

The most alarming dual-failure cases are hitters who score high on both algorithms simultaneously. These are hitters whose mechanics have drifted in two directions at once: some contact manipulation forming and some swing plane steepness developing together. That combination is the hardest to fix because the interventions pull in different directions.

The Prediction

This Is The Place Score correlates with future production more cleanly than single metrics because it captures the conditions for sustainable performance rather than the performance itself.

The Contact Cliff alone correlates with ISO at -0.547, confirming it captures power drain. But it does not capture production failure from swing plane issues.

The Steeps alone does not correlate significantly with xwOBA (r=-0.079) or ISO (r=+0.008), confirming it captures something about real production collapse that expected metrics miss. Steeps hitters are not expected to underperform. They just do.

Combined into the This Is The Place Score, the correlation with wOBA reaches -0.568 and with SLG reaches -0.613. The combination captures both dimensions of mechanical health simultaneously, which is why it outperforms either framework alone.

The implication for roster construction is direct. A team that could identify hitters with clean This Is The Place Scores whose OPS is temporarily suppressed by external factors, and acquire them before the mechanics produce the production their underlying swing deserves, would have a systematic edge over teams relying on conventional outcome metrics alone.

That edge is sitting in public Statcast data right now. The Contact Cliff Score, The Steeps Score, and the This Is The Place combination are all buildable from inputs every team already has. The framework is new. The data was always there.

The Complete Picture

The three-piece framework this series has introduced describes the full mechanical spectrum of MLB hitters for the first time.

The Contact Cliff identifies hitters whose bat-to-ball skill has become a liability. Their hands are too good at finding the ball. The fix is environmental: move forward in the box, compress the decision window, force commitment. Nine hitters out of 128 with four years of stance data moved forward significantly. They are less than half as likely to show cliff fingerprints as those who drifted backward. The league moved in the wrong direction.

The Steeps identifies hitters whose swing plane has become too vertical to navigate. Their power tools are real but the steep path creates systematic contact failures on pitches that exploit the hole beneath the hands. The fix is mechanical: flatten the path through the zone, develop pitch recognition specifically against offspeed, and in some cases adjust position to account for less time for breaking balls to drop.

This Is The Place identifies hitters who are neither. Their swing is committed without being manipulative. Their plane is aggressive without being steep. Their production is in line with or exceeds their mechanical quality. These are the hitters whose performance is most likely to be sustained, and whose temporary production dips are most likely to be external rather than structural.

Jackson Chourio is in the This Is The Place at 20. Randy Arozarena has been there for years. Ryan Jeffers and Jordan Walker are there right now, largely unnoticed.

Steven Kwan, Luis Arraez, and Jeff McNeil went over the Contact Cliff.

Rhys Hoskins, Nick Castellanos, and Jimmy Crooks are in The Steeps.

And somewhere between those two edges, in the zone the sport has never named or measured, is where the most sustainable production in baseball lives.

The sport measures exit velocity to the tenth of a mile per hour. It tracks spin rate, attack angle, bat speed, launch angle, and contact point. It has never asked which of its hitters are in the mechanical this is the place between the two failure modes that end careers.

Until now.