

**SALARY ARBITRATION BETWEEN**

**DERICK BRASSARD**

**AND**

**THE NEW YORK RANGERS**

**BRIEF OF THE NEW YORK RANGERS**

**TEAM 17**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

Pursuant to section 12.9 of the NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement,<sup>1</sup> this brief will analyze the value of New York Rangers centre Derick Brassard. Mr. Brassard is undoubtedly a valuable player but he has several deficiencies in his game that prevent him from becoming a core player on the Rangers franchise. Mr. Brassard does not play well in his defensive zone, is a poor face-off man, and has had several serious injuries throughout both his pro and minor league career. All of these things serve to limit Mr. Brassard's value to the team. As a result, the club submits that Mr. Brassard should be awarded a salary below the 5 million dollar figure, and a reasonable award for a player of his calibre would be 4 million dollars.

### **A. Defensive Liability**

Throughout his career, Mr. Brassard has been a one way player, only performing well in the offensive zone. He has been a defensive liability throughout his time in the league. This has greatly limited the flexibility of the coach to deploy him in any situation, and as such has deprived his overall value to the organization. Mr. Brassard is a career minus 37 in 403 career regular season games,<sup>2</sup> an abysmal number by any measure. This number undersells his poor defensive play, as throughout his career, his coaches have gone to great lengths to hide the deficiencies in his defensive game. This can be seen through Mr. Brassard's offensive zone start percentage, a measure of the proportion of shifts a player begins in the offensive zone. Mr. Brassard has played parts of seven seasons in the NHL, in five of those seasons; he started at least 60% of all his shifts in the offensive zone.<sup>3</sup> During the 2013-2014 season, he started

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<sup>1</sup> NHL CBA

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=stats>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl\\_statistics.php?c=0+1+3+5+4+6+7+8+13+14+29+30+32+33+34+45+46+63+67&ds=1&f3=DERICKBRASSARD&f1=2013\\_s+2013\\_p+2012\\_s+2012\\_p+2011\\_s+2010\\_s+2009\\_s+2008\\_s+2007\\_s#h1](http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl_statistics.php?c=0+1+3+5+4+6+7+8+13+14+29+30+32+33+34+45+46+63+67&ds=1&f3=DERICKBRASSARD&f1=2013_s+2013_p+2012_s+2012_p+2011_s+2010_s+2009_s+2008_s+2007_s#h1)

exactly 60.1% of his shifts in the offensive zone.<sup>4</sup> Despite frequently starting his shifts in the offensive zone, Mr. Brassard has managed to remain a minus player throughout his NHL career.

Based on his plus two rating in 2013-2014, Mr. Brassard could be viewed as having improved his defensive game. When compared to other Rangers forwards, and his usual line mates, Mr. Brassard continues to underperform defensively. His plus two rating was just seventh amongst forwards on team<sup>5</sup>. His usual line mates, Mats Zuccarello and Benoit Pouliot, posted significantly higher plus-minus figures, at plus eleven and plus ten respectively.<sup>6</sup> This seems to indicate that what has improved is Mr. Brassard's teammates, not his defensive game.

A further indictment on Mr. Brassard's lack of defensive ability is the lack of ice time he receives when his team is killing penalties. The penalty kill is when a team is most vulnerable, and as such coaches will often play their most defensively responsible forwards on the penalty kill, at the expense of more offensively gifted players. Thus, it is telling that in Mr. Brassard's entire time in the NHL, he has never taken a regular shift on the penalty kill.<sup>7</sup> Most illustratively, during the 2013-2014 season, he averaged just one second of shorthanded time per game, an average that was lower than thirteen other Rangers forwards. The list included many of the teams other top offensive players like Derek Stepan, Martin St. Louis, Mats Zuccarello and Rick Nash.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Brassard's inability to play shorthanded significantly decreases his value to the Rangers when compared with his more skilled, two way line mates.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142NYRFAFALL&sort=plusMinus&viewName=summary>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=splits>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142NYRFAFALL&sort=avgShortHandedTOIPerGame&viewName=timeOnIce>

Mr. Brassard's defensive limitations result in him playing a very limited role amongst Ranger forwards. In 2012-2013, Mr. Brassard ranked eighth amongst forwards in ice time per game, averaging 16:38 of ice time.<sup>9</sup> In 2013-2014, he averaged less ice time, at 15:37 minutes per game, which placed him seventh amongst team forwards.<sup>10</sup> These rankings would indicate that Mr. Brassard plays a third line, "bottom six" role on the team indicating he is not a core forward on the team. A player with a defensive deficiency this great, playing this type of role on the team, should not be paid five million dollars.

## **B. Poor on Face-offs**

Puck possession is an increasingly important part of the modern game. The easiest way to gain puck possession is by winning the face-off. As such, it follows that a centre can greatly increase their value to the team by winning the majority of their face-offs. Unfortunately, throughout his career, Mr. Brassard has always been a below-average on face-offs. Mr. Brassard has never had a season where he won more than 48.2% of his face-offs.<sup>11</sup> In the 2013-2014 season, he won only 48% of them, the second worst mark amongst Rangers centres.<sup>12</sup> This number is made even worse based on the volume of face-offs that Mr. Brassard took. He took 977 face-offs, ranking 60<sup>th</sup> in the league in the category.<sup>13</sup> However, he had the ninth lowest success rate among players with this kind of volume.<sup>14</sup> Players with a higher volume but lower success rate included younger centres such as Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Nazem Kadri, Cody Eakin

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<sup>9</sup><http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20132NYRFAFALL&sort=avgTOIPerGame&viewName=summary>

<sup>10</sup><http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142NYRFAFALL&sort=avgTOIPerGame&viewName=summary>

<sup>11</sup><http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=splits>

<sup>12</sup><http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?gameType=2&position=F&season=20132014&sort=totalFaceOffs&status=A&team=NYR&viewName=faceOffPercentageAll>

<sup>13</sup><http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142ALLSASALL&viewName=faceOffPercentageAll&sort=totalFaceOffs&pg=2>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

and Sean Monahan,<sup>15</sup> all players who will presumably improve in this category by the time they reach Mr. Brassard's level of experience.

### **C. Injury Prone**

Over the course of his career Mr. Brassard has suffered several severe injuries that are of great concern to the club. He missed the majority of his final junior season in 2006-2007, appearing in just 14 games due to a major shoulder injury.<sup>16</sup> During the 2007-2008 season, he missed almost two months of the AHL season with a broken jaw.<sup>17</sup> In 2008-2009, he again injured his shoulder, this time requiring surgery, missing the remaining 51 games of the season.<sup>18</sup> In light of his several major injuries, including recurring severe shoulder injuries, the Rangers have serious concerns about Mr. Brassard's ability to stay healthy on a consistent basis.

## **II. VALID COMPARABLE PLAYERS**

In examining his statistical achievements alone, it is quite clear that Mr. Brassard's on-ice performance does not merit the \$5 million mid-point salary. In fact, when compared to other players in the league who play a similar role it is immediately apparent that such an outcome would be grossly disproportionate to his performance and an unfair result for the New York Rangers organization. The contracts signed by his teammate Mats Zuccarello in July 2014 and by Montreal Canadiens centre David Desharnais in March 2013 serve to illustrate this point.

### **A. Mats Zuccarello**

In July 2014, the New York Rangers resigned forward Mats Zuccarello to a one-year contract worth \$3.5 million.<sup>19</sup> Zuccarello and Brassard are comparable primarily because they

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=notes>

<sup>17</sup> <http://hfbboards.hockeysfuture.com/showthread.php?t=442486>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=notes>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.capgeek.com/player/1777>

are the same age (both players are 27 years old).<sup>20</sup> However, they also provide for a very interesting comparison because they are teammates and, in fact, often play on the same line. Although Mr. Zuccarello has played significantly fewer games, playing only 144 to Mr. Brassard's 403, the former player has put up significantly better numbers on both the offensive and defensive side of the puck.<sup>21</sup> Over the course of his career, Zuccarello has tallied 30 goals and added 63 assists for 93 points, averaging 0.65 points per game (PPG) and achieving a plus 24 rating.<sup>22</sup> By comparison, Brassard has scored 81 goals and 144 assists for 225 points, averaging 0.55 PPG and achieving a minus 37 rating over the course of his career.<sup>23</sup> These numbers do speak for themselves, however, it is important to take them with a grain of salt; especially considering the disproportionate sample sizes. Moreover, it should be noted that Mr. Brassard has spent the majority of his career with the Columbus Blue Jackets organization, a historically weaker team than the Rangers and that this may have contributed to his poor statistics and especially his low plus/minus rating.

Although their career stats may not offer the best opportunity to compare the performance of Brassard alongside Zuccarello, the 2013-2014 campaign offers an excellent example to do so. The season was a platform year for both players and both played essentially full seasons. In this sense, their comparative statistics are particularly illustrative of their relative value as players. In 77 games, Mr. Zuccarello scored 19 goals and added 40 assists for a total of 59 points.<sup>24</sup> By comparison, in his 81 games Mr. Brassard scored 18 goals and added 27 assists,

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&docid=TeamPlayerBio:44700#&navid=nhl-search>;  
<http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8475692>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8475692>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&docid=TeamPlayerBio:44700#&navid=nhl-search>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8475692>

thus amassing a total of only 45 points to his teammate's 59, despite playing 4 more games.<sup>25</sup> However, it is the defensive aspects of their games that truly differentiate the former player from the latter. Despite the fact that Zuccarello and Brassard were linemates for much of the season, Zuccarello's plus/minus rating of plus 11 was much more impressive than Brassard's plus 2 rating. Further, while Brassard spent almost no time on the penalty kill throughout the season, Zuccarello averaged 33 seconds per game shorthanded in both the regular season and the playoffs. This point serves to demonstrate that while Mr. Brassard is viewed as a defensive liability by Rangers management, the club has confidence in Mr. Zuccarello's defensive abilities.

Mr. Zuccarello has out-performed Mr. Brassard in many key areas of the game, not only over the course of one season but over the course of their careers. Moreover, the fact that Mr. Zuccarello signed a deal worth only \$3.5 million suggests that Mr. Brassard's true value is in fact well below the \$5 million mid-point figure. Although Brassard's greater size as well as his relative longevity in the league may merit an award over and above Zuccarello's \$3.5 million, based on the information available one could only conclude that a \$5 million award would be an unfair outcome for the Rangers organization.

## **B. David Desharnais**

Another player comparable to Mr. Brassard for the purposes of determining his fair market value is David Desharnais, who signed a four-year contract with the Montreal Canadiens in March of 2013 worth an average of \$3.5 million per season.<sup>26</sup> Brassard and Desharnais are comparable mainly because they are similar in age (Desharnais is 28, while Brassard is 27).<sup>27</sup> Although Desharnais has now played 257 career NHL games to Brassard's 403, at the end of his

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&docid=TeamPlayerBio:44700#&navid=nhl-search>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.capgeek.com/player/98>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471976;>

[http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&docid=TeamPlayerBio:44700#&navid=nhl-search.](http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&docid=TeamPlayerBio:44700#&navid=nhl-search)



platform year he had played in only 178 games.<sup>28</sup> As a result of this large gap in the number of games played it is somewhat difficult to make the argument that Desharnais' production warrants him a higher salary than Brassard. However, the purpose of this comparison is simply to show that relative to their total games played, Brassard's production does not merit \$1.5 million per season over and above Desharnais' \$3.5 million per year.

At the end of his platform year (2013), Mr. Desharnais had netted 34 goals and added 77 assists for 111 career points, averaging 0.63 PPG.<sup>29</sup> At the end of the 2014 season, Brassard had amassed 81 goals, 144 assists and 225 points for an average of 0.55 PPG.<sup>30</sup> Thus, relative to their numbers of career games played, Desharnais has outperformed Brassard in most major offensive categories. Furthermore, although Mr. Desharnais' platform year also suffers from fewer games played than Mr. Brassard's 2013-2014 campaign due to the fact that the 2012-2013 season was shortened by a work stoppage, Desharnais achieved numbers similar to Brassard's 2014 stats. In 2012-2013 Desharnais averaged 0.21 goals, 0.38 assists and 0.58 points per game, whereas Brassard recorded per game averages of 0.22, 0.33 and 0.56 respectively in 2013-2014.<sup>31</sup> Given these comparable offensive statistics it is difficult to understand why Mr. Brassard deserves a salary of much higher than the \$3.5 million paid to Mr. Desharnais.

When comparing the defensive and face-off statistics of Mr. Brassard and Mr. Desharnais, it is again difficult to explain why Brassard's numbers would warrant him \$5 million per season. Over the course of his career, Brassard has earned a minus-37 rating as compared to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471976>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&docid=TeamPlayerBio:44700#&navid=nhl-search>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471976>;

<http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&docid=TeamPlayerBio:44700#&navid=nhl-search>.

Desharnais' career plus-4 rating (calculated at the end of his platform year).<sup>32</sup> Although Mr. Desharnais' career plus/minus is not impressive in and of itself, it simply does not expose the types of defensive liabilities implicit in Mr. Brassard's career rating. Further, in terms of their relative performance in the face-off circle, Brassard again does not match the consistency or success rate of the Canadiens centre, who recorded faceoff percentages of 50%, 49.7% and 49.7%, respectively, in his platform year and the two years prior.<sup>33</sup> Given that Mr. Brassard has never won more than 48.2% of his faceoffs in any one season, it seems clear that his ability to win faceoffs is no greater than that of Mr. Desharnais.<sup>34</sup>

There is simply not enough statistical evidence to suggest that \$5 million per year is a fair market value for Derick Brassard. Both players have produced substantially similar offensive numbers relative to their games played and Mr. Desharnais has been the superior player defensively and on face-offs. While Mr. Brassard has played more career games and, thus, his stats provide a fuller picture of his capabilities, this fact alone cannot result in a salary so much higher than that of Mr. Desharnais. For these reasons an award of \$5 million would unreasonably reward Mr. Brassard and unfairly burden the New York Rangers. A salary of \$4 million would be a much fairer representation of his true market value.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Mr. Brassard is clearly a valuable player. However, his defensive deficiencies, below average face-off ability, and significant injury history limit his value. When comparing Mr. Brassard to similar players it becomes clear that he is entitled to a salary below the 5 million dollar midpoint, and that a 4 million dollar salary would be appropriate.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20122013&gameType=2&team=MTL&position=F&country=&status=&viewName=faceOffPercentageAll>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=splits>