Derek Brassard v. New York Rangers

Team #23

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I. Introduction and Overview

Pursuant to section 12.9 of the NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement, this brief will analyze the performance and contributions of Derick Brassard to the New York Rangers (the "Rangers"). As will be evident from the evidence and analysis below, despite the success of the Rangers as a team in the 2013/2014 season, Mr. Brassard's personal performance was mediocre. Mr. Brassard's one dimensional playing style, and lack of top line scoring potential, makes his salary request of more than $5,000,000.00 unreasonable. Alternatively, the Rangers submit that an award of $3,500,000 per season is appropriate.

II. Lack of Contribution to Team Success

Last season, the Rangers finished the regular season in 2nd place in the Eastern Conference. This was followed by a lengthy playoff run, where the Rangers were able to make it to the Stanley Cup Finals. While it takes a team effort to have success like this, Mr. Brassard was not a substantial contributor to the team's success. The Rangers' accomplishments last season – both regular season and playoffs – can be attributed to excellent defence and goaltending.[1]

Table 1 – Rangers Team Performance

	Regular Season				Playoffs			
	G/GP	**GA/GP**	**PP%**	**PK%**	**G/GP**	**GA/GP**	**PP%**	**PK%**
Rangers' Performance	2.61	2.32	18.2	85.3	2.56	2.40	12.6	85.4
League Rank[2]	18th	4th	15th	3rd	11th	2nd	11th	3rd

[1] Henrik Lundqvist was ranked 15th in the league in Goals Against Average (GAA) and Save Percentage for the regular season (*http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142ALLGAGALL&sort=savePercentage&viewName=goalsAgainstAverage*), but 2nd in the league on both of those statistics for the playoffs: (*http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20143ALLGAGALL&sort=goalsAgainstAverage&viewName=savePercentageLeaders*).

[2] Regular Season rank out of 30 teams (source: http://www.nhl.com/ice/teamstats.htm?navid=nav-sts-teams#); Playoff ranking out of 16 teams (source: *http://www.nhl.com/ice/teamstats.htm?fetchKey=20143ALLSAAALL&sort=avgGoalsAgainstPerGame&viewName=summary*).

Mr. Brassard is predominantly an offensive player, who leaves much to be desired defensively. With this in mind, we see that the areas where Mr. Brassard makes most of his contributions (offense and the power play) are the areas where the Rangers had only average performances.

III. One Dimensional Player

Mr. Brassard lacks the two way ability to be relied upon consistently for 20 minutes of ice time per game. His lack of defensive ability is evident in the way he is utilized by the Club's coaching staff. The first and most telling point is that Mr. Brassard was not relied on for the penalty kill – logging slightly more than 2 minutes all season.[3] Furthermore, during the regular season, of Mr. Brassard's average 15:47 time on ice per game (TOI/G), 2:31 of that was time on the power play, meaning that he only logged on average, 13:14 of even strength TOI/G – ranking him 9th among the 12 Rangers forwards.[4] Additionally, his even strength TOI/G was reduced during the playoffs, where Mr. Brassard averaged only 12:43 TOI/G, and was not assigned additional ice time when, then second line centre, Brad Richards was in a performance slump and was demoted to the fourth line.[5]

The insight deepens when one looks at the percentage of shifts that Mr. Brassard was assigned to start in the offensive verses defensive zones. Zone start simply looks at which zone a player begins his shift in, with respect to shifts that begin with faceoffs.[6] The assumption of this statistic, being that a player who is trusted defensively will be put on the ice more often in a situation where the play begins in a defensive zone. Looking at Table 2 below, we see that last

[3] *http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142NYRSASALL&sort=shortHandedTimeOnIce&viewName=timeOnIce*.
[4] *http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142NYRFAFALL&sort=avgEvenStrengthTOIPerGame&viewName=timeOnIce*.
[5] *http://nypost.com/2014/06/12/slumping-brad-richards-demoted-to-fourth-line-duty/*.
[6] *http://www.habseyesontheprize.com/2013/7/18/4532738/fancy-stat-summer-school-zone-starts*.

season, Mr. Brassard started less than 40% of his shifts in the defensive zone, and that this figure is consistent with his career numbers. It could be argued that zone start numbers can be skewed if a player is exceptionally talented in one particular area (offense or defence) and that a coach will start them in the area where they are most gifted, at the expense of starting relatively weaker players at the other end. However, this is likely not the case for Mr. Brassard, as his line was not the top scoring line – that position belonged to the line of Derek Stepan, Rick Nash, and Carl Hagelin.

Table 2 – Zone Start[7]

	Offensive Zone Start %	**Defensive Zone Start %**
2013/2014	60.5	39.5
Career	58.2	41.8

One glaring statistic that partially accounts for Mr. Brassard's limited defensive role is his inability to consistently win faceoffs. Mr. Brassard was ranked 63/80 on the NHL's faceoff leader rankings last regular season,[8] and 36/50 for the playoffs, [9] with win percentages of 48.0 and 47.2 respectively.

IV. Mediocre Offensive Performance

Having established that Mr. Brassard is predominantly an offensive player, one would expect the analysis to get much brighter when looking at his offensive performance. However, rather than being an outstanding performer, Mr. Brassard's offensive production is rather pedestrian. With 45 points in the regular season, he was ranked 111th in the league (4th on the Rangers),

[7] *http://www.hockey-reference.com/players/b/brassde01-additional.html*. Note: excludes neutral zone starts.
[8] *http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142ALLCACALL&viewName=faceOffPercentage&sort=faceOffWinPctg&pg=3*.
[9] *http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20143ALLCACALL&viewName=faceOffPercentage&sort=faceOffWinPctg&pg=2*.

while his 12 post-season points were good enough for 23rd in the league [10] (6th on the Rangers).[11] Table 1 demonstrates that the Rangers' offense (as measured by goals scored per game) was ranked 18th in the league.

What is particularly telling is that of his 45 regular season points, 18 of them came on the power play – giving him a respectable rate of 5.3 points per 60 minutes of power play time (PPP/60).[12] Despite this production, he by no means made the Rangers' power play a dominant one - they were ranked 15th in the league.[13] Moreover, once one takes away the man advantage, Mr. Brassard is left with rather disappointing production at even strength: a mere 1.51 points per 60 minutes of play at even strength (ESP/60), ranking him 9th among Rangers forwards.[14] Things only get worse when accounting for the fact that 8 of his 27 even strength points were secondary assists.[15]

Ultimately, it is clear that while Mr. Brassard was a contributing player on the Rangers last season, he was by no means an integral member of the team. Brassard made little to no contribution in the areas where the Rangers excelled (defence and penalty killing). The area where Mr. Brassard made the most contribution, the power play, was an area where the Rangers were performing averagely in relation to the rest of the NHL. Being such a limited role player, Mr. Brassard's request for an award above $5,000,000.00 is simply not reasonable. This becomes even more apparent when examining the salaries of players comparable to Mr. Brassard.

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[10] *http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=stats*.
[11] *http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20132014&gameType=3&team=NYR&position=F&country=&status=&viewName=points*.
[12] NHL 2013-2014 Player Data retrieved from: *http://www.hockeyabstract.com/testimonials*.
[13] Recalling that they were ranked 15th in the league for success rate.
[14] Hockey Abstract chart *supra* note 12.
[15] Hockey Abstract chart *supra* note 11.

V. Comparable Players

Of the forwards who were Restricted Free Agents in one of the previous two seasons, comparable players were selected who met the following criteria:

- At least 60% of league games played in their platform year,
- +/- 30% of Mr. Brassard's TOI/G (15:34) in the platform season,
- At least 0.3 Points per game (Points/G) the platform season,
- +/- 70% of Mr. Brassard's career NHL games played (403),
- +/- 15% minutes of Mr. Brassard's Career TOI/G (15:39),
- At least 0.4 Points/G in a career,
- Players who signed a contract of 2 years or less.

These search criteria returned the following players as being comparable to Mr. Brassard:

Table 3 – Comparable Players

				Platform Year			Career		
Player	**Platform year**	**Contract Length**	**Midpoint Salary**	**% of GP**	**TOI/G**	**Points/G**	**Games Played**	**TOI/G**	**Points/G**
Derick Brassard	**13/14**	**N/A**	**N/A**	**99%**	**15:34**	**0.56**	**403**	**15:39**	**0.56**
Jiri Tlusty	13/14	1	$2,950,000	83%	15:10	0.44	344	13:41	0.41
Mats Zuccarello	13/14	1	$3,500,000	94%	15:42	0.77	144	15:42	0.65
Chris Stewart	12/13	2	$4,150,000	100%	15:41	0.75	319	15:41	0.55

A. Salary Range

What becomes apparent from examining this list is that the range of salaries does not exceed $4,150,000. Thus, on the upcoming analysis, Mr. Brassard must establish that he is *significantly* better than this group of statistically comparable players to justify a midpoint award of over $5,000,000.

B. Defensive ability

Having established that Mr. Brassard is predominantly a one dimensional offensive player, it should be examined whether the comparable players are offensive as well, to see if they are comparable in style of play.

Table 4 – Player Defensive Usage

Player	SH TOI/G	OZS%	DZS%
Derick Brassard	0:01	60.5	39.5
Jiri Tlusty	0:34	59.5	40.5
Mats Zuccarello	0:33	59	41
Chris Stewart	0:00	60.5	39.5

While all of these players had a limited role on their respective team's penalty killing units, they were at least called on to some extent (with the exception of Chris Stewart). Here it can be said that these players, while not being on the primary penalty killing unit for their teams, were at least trusted to be on the ice during a predominantly defensive situation. That Chris Stewart had similar SH TOI/G at a salary of $4,150,000 however, does mean that a midpoint salary of this amount is not unreasonable based on contribution on the penalty kill.

Looking at Zone Start percentages, all of the comparable players are virtually identical. Thus, the overall similarity indicates that this comparator group is appropriate given their performance and roles on their respective teams, and that a reliable comparison of their offensive abilities can be made.

C. Offensive ability

Table 5 – Offensive Performance of Comparables

Player	Points/G	Rank	ESP/60	Rank	PPP/60	Rank
Derick Brassard	0.56	3rd	1.51	4th	5.3	2nd
Jiri Tlusty	0.44	4th	1.74	3rd	0.6	4th
Mats Zuccarello	0.77	1st	2.13	T-1st	5.1	3rd
Chris Stewart	0.75	2nd	2.13	T-1st	6.4	1st

Looking purely at point production, it is clear to see that not only is Mr. Brassard not significantly better than the comparator group, but he is actually average to below average in the group.

In terms of Mr. Brassard's strongest area of performance (the power play), he indeed ranks well among the comparable players. While he does not perform to the same level as the highest earner in the comparator group (Stewart), he is substantially ahead of the lowest earner (Tlusty). Mr. Brassard and Mr. Zuccarello performed roughly on par with each other, which is not surprising considering that they played on the same power play unit. This particular comparison would suggest that Mr. Brassard should earn around the same figure as Mr. Zuccarello's $3,500,000.

Looking at offensive production at even strength, Mr. Brassard is actually the worst performer in the group. His ESP/60 of 1.51 puts him behind even Jiri Tlusty, indicating he is the worst performer in the group at even strength. To get a sense of whether his power play performance makes up for his lagging even strength contributions, we can look at Brassard's overall Points/G numbers. Here, it shows that his total offensive production is indeed better than Mr. Tlusty's, with all things being considered. This would indicate that Mr. Brassard should be entitled to an award above $2,950,000.

Comparing Mr. Brassard's offensive performance to Mr. Stewart's, there is no question that Mr. Stewart was considerably better. Mr. Stewart outperformed Mr. Brassard both at even strength, and on the power play. Therefore, Mr. Brassard's award should be lower than Mr. Stewart's $4,150,000.

The direct comparison to Mr. Zuccarello is especially helpful, as they played on the same line last season, which also happened to be both of their platform years. Playing on the same line

controls for many variables such as quality of team mates, quality of competition, situations played in, and so on. On this analysis, we see that Mr. Zuccarello's offensive performance was far better than Mr. Brassard's. They both performed about the same on the power play, but Mr. Zuccarello's even strength production was 50% better than Mr. Brassard's. The net result was that Zuccarello finished the regular season as the Rangers' point leader with 59 points – nearly 30% better than Mr. Brassard's 45 points.

Admittedly however, a winger has fewer defensive responsibilities, and does not necessarily have the same skills in the faceoff circle. Assuming these additional attributes make up for a 30% scoring differential, the Rangers respectfully submit that an award on par with Mr. Zuccarello's $3,500,000 salary is reasonable.

VI. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis shows that while the Rangers did have considerable success last season, it was in large part due to areas of performance that Mr. Brassard had little to do with. The areas where Mr. Brassard had the most contribution were strikingly average. When comparing Mr. Brassard against a comparator group shown to play similar roles on their respective teams, Mr. Brassard's performance failed to set him apart from the group. Thus, it is submitted that an award in the middle of the comparator salary range is fair and reasonable. More specifically, Mr. Brassard should be awarded a midpoint salary at the same level as his line-mate, Mats Zuccarello: $3,500,000.