

In the Matter of Salary Arbitration Between:

Cody Franson

-And-

Toronto Maple Leafs

Brief of: Toronto Maple Leafs (Club)

Team 31

Table of Contents

PART I – OVERVIEW	1
PART II – INTRODUCTION TO CODY FRANSON	1
PART III – SELECTION OF VALID COMPARABLE PLAYERS	3
PART IV – ANALYSIS OF FRANSON AND COMPARABLE PLAYERS	4
A. JASON DEMERS	4
B. CARL GUNNARSSON	6
C. KEVIN SHATTENKIRK	7
PART V - CONCLUSION	8

PART I – OVERVIEW

Pursuant to Article 12.9 of the NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement,¹ this brief represents the position of the Toronto Maple Leafs (the “Club” or “Maple Leafs”) in the arbitration hearing of Cody Franson (“Franson”). The analysis below will demonstrate that Franson, despite the vast opportunity given to him by the Club, has not yet developed into the quality of player required by the Club. He has underperformed offensively and does not contribute enough defensively to be rewarded with a salary increase of more than fifty-percent. As such, the Club submits that Cody Franson is entitled to an award of \$3.0 million per year.

PART II – INTRODUCTION TO CODY FRANSON

Cody Franson was drafted 79th overall in the 2005 NHL Entry Draft by the Nashville Predators.² He played two seasons for the Predators before being acquired by the Maple Leafs through a trade in the 2010-11 off-season.³ Prior to last season, Franson signed a one-year contract with the Club for \$2 million that was reflective of his performance and contributions to the Club to that point.⁴ Franson has played a total of three seasons for the Club and played 79 of 82 games in his Platform Year.⁵ His average time on ice (“ATOI”), during his time with the Club and in his career overall, has increased steadily year to year from 14:12 in his rookie season with Nashville to 20:41 in his Platform Year with the Club. Franson plays in every situation; he logs a lot of time at even strength, plays a significant role on the power play, and also kills penalties. His points per game (“P/GP”) in his Platform Year was a respectable 0.42, very comparable to his Career to Platform 0.41 P/GP suggesting some consistency in that regard. Franson, like many other young NHL players, has a tendency to make mistakes controlling the puck. In his Platform

¹ NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2013

² <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>

³ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

⁴ <http://www.capgeek.com>.

⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>; “Platform Year” is defined as the year immediately preceding a player’s arbitration eligibility.

Year, Franson racked up a total of 68 giveaways, an average rate of 0.9 giveaways per game played.⁶

Franson led the league in hits by a defenseman last season.⁷ He also had 111 blocked shots, third most on the Maple Leafs.⁸ Although these statistics may seem to demonstrate the contributions of an aggressive individual who isn't afraid to sacrifice his body for the sake of the team, they really are demonstrative of the Club's overall lack of puck possession. Both hits and blocked shots are statistics that can only be accumulated when a team does not possess the puck. Last season, the Maple Leafs were last in the league in shots against per game and only managed to outshoot their opponents in a total of 15 games (second worst in the league).⁹ The Maple Leaf's had thirteen players with at least 100 hits.¹⁰ The five teams that allowed the fewest shots per game averaged less than six players with more than 100 hits.¹¹

Cody Franson has demonstrated a clear ability to produce on the power play. Of his 33 points last season, 18 (55%) were scored on the power play.¹² Although he played less time on the power play than teammate Dion Phaneuf, he outscored Phaneuf by a considerable margin.¹³ However, considering that power play goals represent only 1 in 5 NHL goals throughout the season, the time spent at even strength has a much greater influence on the overall production of any team.¹⁴ Although Franson's power play statistics are impressive, he has yet to demonstrate his offensive or defensive capabilities during even strength situations.

⁶ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

⁷ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

⁸ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/teamstats.htm>.

¹⁰ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

¹¹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

¹² <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

¹³ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

¹⁴ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/teamstats.htm>.

The easiest way to look at overall success at even strength is to look at a player's plus/minus rating. Franson's plus/minus rating last season was -20, by far the worst rating of any defenseman on the Club and one of the worst in the NHL.¹⁵ A more precise method of looking at overall success at even strength is to look at even strength goals for and against while a player is on the ice compared to those stats when a player is off the ice. Last season, while Franson was on the ice, the Maple Leafs scored an average of 2.2 goals for per sixty even strength minutes ("GF/60") and they allowed an average of 2.8 goals against per sixty even strength minutes ("GA/60").¹⁶ When Franson was off the ice, the Maple Leafs scored at a rate of 2.3 GF/60 and allowed 2.2 GA/60.¹⁷ Statistically speaking, this means that the Club is outscored by a rate of 0.6 goals per sixty minutes while Franson is on the ice, but they actually outscore their opponents at a rate of 0.1 goals per sixty minutes while Franson is not on the ice. This demonstrates that the Club generally performed better, in terms of goals for and against, while Franson was off the ice.

Franson's lack of offensive success at even strength cannot be attributed to the quality of his linemates. Franson played most often with Phil Kessel, James van Riemsdyk, Joffrey Lupul, and Jake Gardiner,¹⁸ three of the Club's most offensively gifted forwards and the next highest scoring defenseman.¹⁹ He has been given every opportunity to succeed at even strength, but does not produce points at the rate expected of him given the quality of his linemates.

PART III – SELECTION OF VALID COMPARABLE PLAYERS

The Club selected its comparable players through the use of objective statistical criteria. This allows for an impartial selection of comparable players based on their statistical performance. Only NHL defensemen who were arbitration eligible at the conclusion of the 2012-

¹⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/teamstats.htm>.

¹⁶ <http://www.stats.hockeyanalysis.com/ratings.php>.

¹⁷ <http://www.stats.hockeyanalysis.com/ratings.php>.

¹⁸ <http://www.hockeyabstract.com/testimonials>

¹⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>

13 or 2013-14 seasons were considered. Players who were arbitration eligible at the end of the 2013-14 season, but who had not signed a contract prior to July 21, 2014 were not considered.

The criteria used by the Club to select its comparable players was:

Platform Year²⁰

- +/- 4 minutes of regular season ATOI
- Played in at least half of their team's regular season games
- +/- 40% of regular season P/GP

Career to Platform²¹

- +/- 4 minutes of regular season ATOI
- +/- 40% of total regular season games played
- +/- 40% of regular season P/GP

A total of three NHL defensemen fit the criteria mentioned above and are depicted in Table 1. The Club will use all three players as comparable players to Cody Franson. These players are Jason Demers, Carl Gunnarsson, and Kevin Shattenkirk.

*Table 1: Comparable Players*²²

Player	Platform Year	Platform Year			Career To Platform		
		GP	ATOI	P/GP	GP	ATOI	P/GP
Cody Franson	2014	79	20:41	0.42	322	17:01	0.41
Jason Demers	2014	75	19:29	0.45	280	18:08	0.34
Carl Gunnarsson	2013	37	21:17	0.41	224	20:32	0.31
Kevin Shattenkirk	2013	48	21:18	0.48	201	20:54	0.54

PART IV – ANALYSIS OF FRANSON AND COMPARABLE PLAYERS

A. JASON DEMERS

In July 2014, Jason Demers (“Demers”) signed a two-year deal with the San Jose Sharks worth an average of \$3.4 million per year.²³ As seen in *Table 1*, Demers played an average of

²⁰ Between 16:41–24:41 ATOI; at least 41 GP in 2013-14 or 24 GP in 2012-13; between 0.25–0.58 P/GP.

²¹ Between 15:01 – 21:01 ATOI; between 193 – 451 total games played; between 0.25 – 0.58 P/GP.

²² All performance statistics in *Table 1* are available at <http://www.nhl.com>.

19:29 per game last season, which is fairly similar to Franson's ATOI of 20:41. Demers also plays in all situations. He played an average of 16:08 per game at even strength last season, which is exactly the same as Franson.²⁴ He also played 1:25 and 1:55 per game short-handed and on the power play, respectively.²⁵ Franson played about a minute more per game on the power play (2:54), but nearly the same short-handed (1:38).²⁶ During his Platform Year, Demers produced a total of 34 points at a rate of 0.45 P/GP, which is slightly higher than that of Franson, despite playing less time on the power play.²⁷ Like Franson, Demers turns the puck over at a fairly high rate; specifically, he turned the puck over at a rate of 0.9 giveaways per game during last season, which is the same rate as Franson.²⁸

Despite having similar time on ice, points per game, and giveaway statistics, Demers shows significant differences over Franson through his play at even strength. In terms of plus/minus rating, Demers was a very respectable +14 last season, while Franson was a team worst -20.²⁹ During his Platform Year, Demers produced even strength points at a rate of 1.19 points per sixty minutes of ice time ("ESP/60").³⁰ Franson only produced at a rate of 0.71 ESP/60.³¹ Furthermore, while Demers was on the ice, the San Jose Sharks outscored their opponents 2.9 GF/60 to 2.4 GA/60, a difference of 0.5 goals per sixty minutes.³² While Demers was off the ice, San Jose only managed to outscore their opponents by 0.1 goals per sixty minutes (2.3 GF/60, 2.2 GA/60).³³ This demonstrates that the San Jose Sharks performed better

²³ <http://www.capegeek.com>.

²⁴ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

²⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

²⁶ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

²⁷ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

²⁸ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

²⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

³⁰ <http://www.hockeyabstract.com/testimonials>.

³¹ <http://www.hockeyabstract.com/testimonials>.

³² <http://www.stats.hockeyanalysis.com/ratings.php>.

³³ <http://www.stats.hockeyanalysis.com/ratings.php>.

with Demers on the ice than with him off the ice. As shown above, the Maple Leafs actually performed better in even strength situations while Franson was off the ice.

Although Demers and Franson have similar statistics in terms of points per game, time on ice and giveaways, Demers clearly outperforms Franson by a wide margin at even strength. The Club submits that Franson's award should be significantly lower than Demers' average salary of \$3.4 million per year.

B. CARL GUNNARSSON

In July 2013, Carl Gunnarsson ("Gunnarsson") signed a three-year deal with the Toronto Maple Leafs worth an average of \$3.15 million per year.³⁴ He was a teammate of Franson's for the previous three seasons, but was traded to the St. Louis Blues this past off-season.³⁵ In his Platform Year, Gunnarsson played an average of 21:17 per game, which is fairly similar to that of Franson.³⁶ Gunnarsson's time on the ice is much more skewed towards even strength and short-handed situations (17:55 and 2:45 per game, respectively).³⁷ He did not play very often on the power play and did not register a single point on the power play; however, he still managed to score at a rate of 0.41 P/GP, nearly identical to Franson's rate of 0.42 P/GP.³⁸ Much like Franson, Gunnarsson also turned the puck over at a rate of 0.9 turnovers per game.³⁹

Where Gunnarsson really excels is at even strength. During his Platform Year, Gunnarsson had a plus/minus rating of +5, far better than Franson's rating, despite only playing in 37 games.⁴⁰ At even strength points, Gunnarsson produced at a rate of 1.36 ESP/60, a rate nearly double that of Franson.⁴¹ Furthermore, while Gunnarsson was on the ice, the Maple Leafs

³⁴ <http://www.capegeek.com>.

³⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

³⁶ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

³⁷ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

³⁸ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

³⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

⁴⁰ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

⁴¹ <http://www.hockeyabstract.com/testimonials>.

outscored their opponents at a rate of 0.6 goals per sixty even strength minutes (2.9 GF/60, 2.3 GA/60).⁴² While Gunnarsson was off the ice, this rate decreased to only 0.1 goals per sixty minutes (2.3 GF/60, 2.2 GA/60).⁴³ This demonstrates that, unlike Franson, Gunnarsson's team actually performed better at even strength while Gunnarsson was on the ice than while he was off the ice.

Despite similar statistics for time on ice, points per game, and giveaways, Gunnarsson is a much stronger player as depicted in his even strength performance. The Club submits that Franson's award should be less than Gunnarsson's average salary of \$3.15 million.

C. KEVIN SHATTENKIRK

In June 2013, Kevin Shattenkirk ("Shattenkirk") signed a four-year extension with the St. Louis Blues worth an average of \$4.25 million per year.⁴⁴ Shattenkirk and Franson are utilized in very similar roles on their respective teams. Shattenkirk played 16:56 per game at even strength, 2:37 per game on the power play, and 1:46 on the penalty kill during his Platform Year, which is very similar to Franson's time on ice statistics.⁴⁵ Although their time on ice was similar, Shattenkirk produced points at a higher rate than Franson (0.48 P/GP and 0.42 P/GP, respectively).⁴⁶ Defensively, Shattenkirk is a much more stable defenseman; he committed only 0.5 giveaways per game during his Platform Year, nearly half that of Franson.⁴⁷

At even strength, Shattenkirk is a much better player than Franson. Shattenkirk attained a +2 plus/minus rating during his Platform Year.⁴⁸ Offensively, he outperformed Franson at even strength (1.04 ESP/60 compared to 0.71 ESP/60).⁴⁹ While Shattenkirk was on the ice, the St.

⁴² <http://www.stats.hockeyanalysis.com/ratings.php>.

⁴³ <http://www.stats.hockeyanalysis.com/ratings.php>.

⁴⁴ <http://www.capgeek.com>.

⁴⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>; see above for Franson's time on ice statistics.

⁴⁶ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

⁴⁷ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

⁴⁸ <http://www.hockeyabstract.com/testimonials>.

⁴⁹ <http://www.hockeyabstract.com/testimonials>.

Louis Blues outscored their opponents at a rate of 0.5 goals per sixty minutes (2.2 GF/60, 1.7 GA/60) while they scored at the same rate as their opponents when he was off the ice (2.2 GF/60, 2.2 GA/60).⁵⁰ The large increase in goals against when Shattenkirk was off the ice goes to show how important Shattenkirk is in stabilizing the defense of the St. Louis Blues. Franson has proven to have the opposite effect, as he is a liability defensively.

Although Shattenkirk and Franson are used in similar positions by their respective clubs, Shattenkirk's points per game, giveaway, and even strength performance statistics all show that Shattenkirk he is a significantly better defenseman than Franson. The Club submits that Franson's award should be far less than Shattenkirk's average salary of \$4.25 million.

PART V - CONCLUSION

Cody Franson may well outperform his expectations in the future; however, there are significant holes in his development at this point in his career. He has shown that he can be effective on the power play; however, as a majority of the game occurs at even strength, a defenseman's true contribution to his team can be shown by his performance while at even strength. Franson's lack of success at even strength, especially in comparison to Demers, Gunnarsson, and Shattenkirk suggests that he should receive an award below that of each of these three players. Therefore, the Club respectfully submits that Cody Franson should receive an award of \$3.0 million per year.

⁵⁰ <http://www.hockeyabstract.com/testimonials>.